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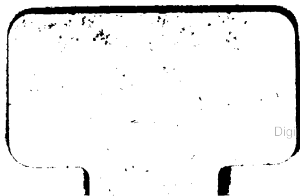
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# Historians and Essayists

**EDWARD GIBBON**

By W. E. H. LECKY

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**THOMAS BABINGTON MACAULAY**

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**WASHINGTON IRVING**

By EDWIN W. MORSE

**WILLIAM HICKLING PRESCOTT**

By FRANCIS NEWTON THORPE

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**VOLUME FOUR**  
**HISTORIANS AND ESSAYISTS**



# CONTENTS

## VOL. IV.

	PAGE
EDWARD GIBBON	
BY W. E. H. LECKY . . . . .	9
THOMAS CARLYLE	
BY LESLIE STEPHEN . . . . .	33
RALPH WALDO EMERSON	
BY DR. RICHARD GARNETT . . . . .	63
MATTHEW ARNOLD	
BY PROF. GEORGE E. WOODBERRY . . . . .	97
THOMAS BABINGTON MACAULAY	
BY JOHN BACH McMASTER . . . . .	127
WASHINGTON IRVING	
BY EDWIN W. MORSE . . . . .	143
WILLIAM HICKLING PRESCOTT	
BY FRANCIS NEWTON THORPE . . . . .	169





**EDWARD GIBBON**

**BY,**

**W. E. H. LECKY**





## EDWARD GIBBON



THE history of Gibbon has been described by John Stuart Mill as the only eighteenth-century history that has withstood nineteenth-century criticism; and whatever objections modern critics may bring against some of its parts, the substantial justice of this verdict will scarcely be contested. No other history of that century has been so often reprinted, annotated, and discussed, or remains to the present day a capital authority on the great period of which it treats. As a composition it stands unchallenged and conspicuous among the masterpieces of English literature, while as a history it covers a space of more than twelve hundred years, including some of the most

## *HISTORIANS AND ESSAYISTS*

momentous events in the annals of mankind.

Gibbon was born at Putney, Surrey, April 27th, 1737. Though his father was a member of Parliament and the owner of a moderate competence, the author of this great work was essentially a self-educated man. Weak health and almost constant illness in early boyhood broke up his school life,—which appears to have been fitfully and most imperfectly conducted,—withdrew him from boyish games, but also gave him, as it has given to many other shy and sedentary boys, an early and inveterate passion for reading. His reading, however, was very unlike that of an ordinary boy. He has given a graphic picture of the ardor with which, when he was only fourteen, he flung himself into serious but unguided study; which was at first purely desultory, but gradually contracted into historic lines, and soon concentrated itself mainly on that Oriental history which he was one day so brilliantly to illuminate. "Before I was sixteen," he says, "I had exhausted all that could be learned in English of the Arabs and Persians, the Tartars and Turks; and the same ardor

## EDWARD GIBBON

led me to guess at the French of D'Herbelot, and to construe the barbarous Latin of Pocock's 'Abulfaragius.' »

His health however gradually improved, and when he entered Magdalen College, Oxford, it might have been expected that a new period of intellectual development would have begun; but Oxford had at this time sunk to the lowest depth of stagnation, and to Gibbon it proved extremely uncongenial. He complained that he found no guidance, no stimulus, and no discipline, and that the fourteen months he spent there were the most idle and unprofitable of his life. They were very unexpectedly cut short by his conversion to the Roman Catholic faith, which he formally adopted at the age of sixteen.

This conversion is, on the whole, the most surprising incident of his calm and uneventful life. The tendencies of the time, both in England and on the Continent, were in a wholly different direction. The more spiritual and emotional natures were now passing into the religious revival of Wesley and Whitefield, which was slowly transforming the character of the Anglican Church and laying the foundations of the great

## *HISTORIANS AND ESSAYISTS*

Evangelical party. In other quarters the predominant tendencies were towards unbelief, skepticism, or indifference. Nature seldom formed a more skeptical intellect than that of Gibbon, and he was utterly without the spiritual insight, or spiritual cravings, or overmastering enthusiasms, that produce and explain most religious changes. Nor was he in the least drawn towards Catholicism on its æsthetic side. He had never come in contact with its worship or its professors; and to his unimaginative, unimpassioned, and profoundly intellectual temperament, no ideal type could be more uncongenial than that of the saint. He had however from early youth been keenly interested in theological controversies. He argued, like Lardner and Paley, that miracles are the Divine attestation of orthodoxy. Middleton convinced him that unless the Patristic writers were wholly undeserving of credit, the gift of miracles continued in the Church during the fourth and fifth centuries; and he was unable to resist the conclusion that during that period many of the leading doctrines of Catholicism had passed into the Church. The writings of the Jesuit Parsons, and still

## *EDWARD GIBBON*

more the writings of Bossuet, completed the work which Middleton had begun. Having arrived at this conclusion, Gibbon acted on it with characteristic honesty, and was received into the Church on the 8th of June, 1753.

The English universities were at this time purely Anglican bodies, and the conversion of Gibbon excluded him from Oxford. His father judiciously sent him to Lausanne to study with a Swiss pastor named Pavilliard, with whom he spent five happy and profitable years. The theological episode was soon terminated. Partly under the influence of his teacher, but much more through his own reading and reflections, he soon disentangled the purely intellectual ties that bound him to the Church of Rome; and on Christmas Day, 1754, he received the sacrament in the Protestant church of Lausanne.

His residence at Lausanne was very useful to him. He had access to books in abundance, and his tutor, who was a man of great good sense and amiability, but of no remarkable capacity, very judiciously left his industrious pupil to pursue his studies in his own way. "Hiving wisdom with each studious year," as Byron so truly



## *HISTORIANS AND ESSAYISTS*

says, he speedily amassed a store of learning which has seldom been equaled. His insatiable love of knowledge, his rare capacity for concentrated, accurate, and fruitful study, guided by a singularly sure and masculine judgment, soon made him, in the true sense of the word, one of the best scholars of his time. His learning, however, was not altogether of the kind that may be found in a great university professor. Though the classical languages became familiar to him, he never acquired or greatly valued the minute and finished scholarship which is the boast of the chief English schools; and careful students have observed that in following Greek books he must have very largely used the Latin translations. Perhaps in his capacity of historian this deficiency was rather an advantage than the reverse. It saved him from the exaggerated value of classical form, and from the neglect of the more corrupt literatures, to which English scholars have been often prone. Gibbon always valued books mainly for what they contained, and he had early learned the lesson which all good historians should learn: that some of his most valuable materials will be found in litera-

## EDWARD GIBBON

tures that have no artistic merit; in writers who, without theory and almost without criticism, simply relate the facts which they have seen, and express in unsophisticated language the beliefs and impressions of their time.

Lausanne and not Oxford was the real birthplace of his intellect, and he returned from it almost a foreigner. French had become as familiar to him as his own tongue; and his first book, a somewhat superficial essay on the study of literature, was published in the French language. The noble contemporary French literature filled him with delight, and he found on the borders of the Lake of Geneva a highly cultivated society to which he was soon introduced, and which probably gave him more real pleasure than any in which he afterwards moved. With Voltaire himself he had some slight acquaintance, and he at one time looked on him with profound admiration; though fuller knowledge made him sensible of the flaws in that splendid intellect. I am here concerned with the life of Gibbon only in as far as it discloses the influences that contributed to his master work, and among these influences the foreign

## *HISTORIANS AND ESSAYISTS*

element holds a prominent place. There was little in Gibbon that was distinctively English; his mind was essentially cosmopolitan. His tastes, ideals, and modes of thought and feeling turned instinctively to the Continent.

In one respect this foreign type was of great advantage to his work. Gibbon excels all other English historians in symmetry, proportion, perspective, and arrangement, which are also the pre-eminent and characteristic merits of the best French literature. We find in his writing nothing of the great miscalculations of space that were made by such writers as Macaulay and Buckle; nothing of the awkward repetitions, the confused arrangement, the semi-detached and disjointed episodes that mar the beauty of many other histories of no small merit. Vast and multifarious as are the subjects which he has treated, his work is a great whole, admirably woven in all its parts. On the other hand, his foreign taste may perhaps be seen in his neglect of the Saxon element, which is the most vigorous and homely element in English prose. Probably in no other English writer does the Latin element so entirely predominate. Gibbon never wrote an unmean-

## EDWARD GIBBON

ing and very seldom an obscure sentence; he could always paint with sustained and stately eloquence an illustrious character or a splendid scene: but he was wholly wanting in the grace of simplicity, and a monotony of glitter and of mannerism is the great defect of his style. He possessed, to a degree which even Tacitus and Bacon had hardly surpassed, the supreme literary gift of condensation, and it gives an admirable force and vividness to his narrative; but it is sometimes carried to excess. Not unfrequently it is attained by an excessive allusiveness, and a wide knowledge of the subject is needed to enable the reader to perceive the full import and meaning conveyed or hinted at by a mere turn of phrase. But though his style is artificial and pedantic, and greatly wanting in flexibility, it has a rare power of clinging to the memory, and it has profoundly influenced English prose. That excellent judge Cardinal Newman has said of Gibbon, "I seem to trace his vigorous condensation and peculiar rhythm at every turn in the literature of the present day."

It is not necessary to relate here in any detail the later events of the life of Gibbon.

## *HISTORIANS AND ESSAYISTS*

There was his enlistment as captain in the Hampshire militia. It involved two and a half years of active service, extending from May 1760 to December 1762; and as Gibbon afterwards acknowledged, if it interrupted his studies and brought him into very uncongenial duties and societies, it at least greatly enlarged his acquaintance with English life, and also gave him a knowledge of the rudiments of military science, which was not without its use to the historian of so many battles. There was a long journey, lasting for two years and five months, in France and Italy, which greatly confirmed his foreign tendencies. In Paris he moved familiarly in some of the best French literary society; and in Rome, as he tells us in a well-known passage, while he sat "musing amidst the ruins of the Capitol while the barefooted friars were singing vespers in the Temple of Jupiter" (which is now the Church of the Ara Coeli),—on October 15th, 1764,—he first conceived the idea of writing the history of the decline and fall of Rome.

There was also that very curious episode in his life, lasting from 1774 to 1782,—his

## *EDWARD GIBBON*

appearance in the House of Commons. He had declined an offer of his father's to purchase a seat for him in 1760; and fourteen years later, when his father was dead, when his own circumstances were considerably contracted, he received and accepted at the hands of a family connection the offer of a seat. His Parliamentary career was entirely undistinguished, and he never even opened his mouth in debate,—a fact which was not forgotten when very recently another historian was candidate for a seat in Parliament. In truth, this somewhat shy and reserved scholar, with his fastidious taste, his eminently judicial mind, and his highly condensed and elaborate style, was singularly unfit for the rough work of Parliamentary discussion. No one can read his books without perceiving that his English was not that of a debater; and he has candidly admitted that he entered Parliament without public spirit or serious interest in politics, and that he valued it chiefly as leading to an office which might restore the fortune which the extravagance of his father had greatly impaired. His only real public service was the composition in French of a reply to the French manifesto which

## *HISTORIANS AND ESSAYISTS*

was issued at the beginning of the war of 1778. He voted steadily and placidly as a Tory, and it is not probable that in doing so he did any violence to his opinions. Like Hume, he shrank with an instinctive dislike from all popular agitations, from all turbulence, passion, exaggeration, and enthusiasm; and a temperate and well-ordered despotism was evidently his ideal. He showed it in the well-known passage in which he extols the benevolent despotism of the Antonines as without exception the happiest period in the history of mankind, and in the unmixed horror with which he looked upon the French Revolution that broke up the old landmarks of Europe. For three years he held an office in the Board of Trade, which added considerably to his income without adding greatly to his labors, and he supported steadily the American policy of Lord North and the Coalition ministry of North and Fox; but the loss of his office and the retirement of North soon drove him from Parliament, and he shortly after took up his residence at Lausanne.

But before this time a considerable part of his great work had been accomplished.

*EDWARD GIBBON*

The first quarto volume of the 'Decline and Fall' appeared in February 1776. As is usually the case with historical works, it occupied a much longer period than its successors, and was the fruit of about ten years of labor. It passed rapidly through three editions, received the enthusiastic eulogy of Hume and Robertson, and was no doubt greatly assisted in its circulation by the storm of controversy that arose about his Fifteenth and Sixteenth Chapters. In April 1781 two more volumes appeared, and the three concluding volumes were published together on the 8th of May, 1788, being the fifty-first birthday of the author.

A work of such magnitude, dealing with so vast a variety of subjects, was certain to exhibit some flaws. The controversy at first turned mainly upon its religious tendency. The complete skepticism of the author, his aversion to the ecclesiastical type which dominated in the period of which he wrote, and his unalterable conviction that Christianity, by diverting the strength and enthusiasm of the Empire from civic into ascetic and ecclesiastical channels, was a main cause of the downfall of the Empire and of the triumph of barbarism, gave him



## *HISTORIANS AND ESSAYISTS*

a bias which it was impossible to overlook. On no other subject is his irony more bitter or his contempt so manifestly displayed. Few good critics will deny that the growth of the ascetic spirit had a large part in corroding and enfeebling the civic virtues of the Empire; but the part which it played was that of intensifying a disease that had already begun, and Gibbon, while exaggerating the amount of the evil, has very imperfectly described the great services rendered even by a monastic Church in laying the basis of another civilization and in mitigating the calamities of the barbarian invasion. The causes he has given of the spread of Christianity in the Fifteenth Chapter were for the most part true causes, but there were others of which he was wholly insensible. The strong moral enthusiasms that transform the character and inspire or accelerate all great religious changes lay wholly beyond the sphere of his realizations. His language about the Christian martyrs is the most repulsive portion of his work; and his comparison of the sufferings caused by pagan and Christian persecutions is greatly vitiated by the fact that he only takes account of the number of

## EDWARD GIBBON

deaths, and lays no stress on the profuse employment of atrocious tortures, which was one of the most distinct features of the pagan persecutions. At the same time, though Gibbon displays in this field a manifest and a distorting bias, he never, like some of his French contemporaries, sinks into the mere partisan, awarding to one side unqualified eulogy and to the other unqualified contempt. Let the reader who doubts this examine and compare his masterly portraits of Julian and of Athanasius, and he will perceive how clearly the great historian could recognize weaknesses in the characters by which he was most attracted, and elements of true greatness in those by which he was most repelled. A modern writer, in treating of the history of religions, would have given a larger space to comparative religion, and to the gradual, unconscious, and spontaneous growth of myths in the twilight periods of the human mind. These however were subjects which were scarcely known in the days of Gibbon, and he cannot be blamed for not having discussed them.

Another class of objections which has been brought against him is that he is

## *HISTORIANS AND ESSAYISTS*

weak upon the philosophical side, and deals with history mainly as a mere chronicle of events, and not as a chain of causes and consequences, a series of problems to be solved, a gradual evolution which it is the task of the historian to explain. Coleridge, who detested Gibbon and spoke of him with gross injustice, has put this objection in the strongest form. He accuses him of having reduced history to a mere collection of splendid anecdotes; of noting nothing but what may produce an effect; of skipping from eminence to eminence without ever taking his readers through the valleys between; of having never made a single philosophical attempt to fathom the ultimate causes of the decline and fall of the Roman Empire, which is the very subject of his history. That such charges are grossly exaggerated will be apparent to any one who will carefully read the Second and Third Chapters, describing the state and tendencies of the Empire under the Antonines; or the chapters devoted to the rise and character of the barbarians, to the spread of Christianity, to the influence of monasticism, to the jurisprudence of the republic and of the

## EDWARD GIBBON

Empire; nor would it be difficult to collect many acute and profound philosophical remarks from other portions of the history. Still, it may be admitted that the philosophical side is not its strongest part. Social and economical changes are sometimes inadequately examined and explained, and we often desire fuller information about the manners and life of the masses of the people. As far as concerns the age of the Antonines, this want has been amply supplied by the great work of Friedländer.

History, like many other things in our generation, has fallen largely into the hands of specialists; and it is inevitable that men who have devoted their lives to a minute examination of short periods should be able to detect some deficiencies and errors in a writer who traversed a period of more than twelve hundred years. Many generations of scholars have arisen since Gibbon; many new sources of knowledge have become available, and archæology especially has thrown a flood of new light on some of the subjects he treated. Though his knowledge and his narrative are on the whole admirably sustained,

## *HISTORIANS AND ESSAYISTS*

there are periods which he knew less well and treated less fully than others. His account of the Crusades is generally acknowledged to be one of the most conspicuous of these, and within the last few years there has arisen a school of historians who protest against the low opinion of the Byzantine Empire which was held by Gibbon, and was almost universal among scholars till the present generation. That these writers have brought into relief certain merits of the Lower Empire which Gibbon had neglected, will not be denied; but it is perhaps too early to decide whether the reaction has not, like most reactions, been carried to extravagance, and whether in its general features the estimate of Gibbon is not nearer the truth than some of those which are now put forward to replace it.

Much must no doubt be added to the work of Gibbon in order to bring it up to the level of our present knowledge; but there is no sign that any single work is likely to supersede it or to render it useless to the student; nor does its survival depend only or even mainly on its great literary

## EDWARD GIBBON

qualities, which have made it one of the classics of the language. In some of these qualities Hume was the equal of Gibbon and in others his superior, and he brought to his history a more penetrating and philosophical intellect and an equally calm and unenthusiastic nature; but the study which Hume bestowed on his subject was so superficial and his statements were often so inaccurate, that his work is now never quoted as an authority. With Gibbon it is quite otherwise. His marvelous industry, his almost unrivaled accuracy of detail, his sincere love of truth, his rare discrimination and insight in weighing testimony and in judging character, have given him a secure place among the greatest historians of the world.

His life lasted only fifty-six years; he died in London on January 15th, 1794. With a single exception his history is his only work of real importance. That exception is his admirable autobiography. Gibbon left behind him six distinct sketches, which his friend Lord Sheffield put together with singular skill. It is one of the best specimens of self-portraiture in

## *HISTORIANS AND ESSAYISTS*

the language, reflecting with pellucid clearness both the life and character, the merits and defects, of its author. He was certainly neither a hero nor a saint; nor did he possess the moral and intellectual qualities that dominate in the great conflicts of life, sway the passions of men, appeal powerfully to the imagination, or dazzle and impress in social intercourse. He was a little slow, a little pompous, a little affected and pedantic. In the general type of his mind and character he bore much more resemblance to Hume, Adam Smith, or Reynolds, than to Johnson or Burke. A reserved scholar, who was rather proud of being a man of the world; a confirmed bachelor, much wedded to his comforts though caring nothing for luxury, he was eminently moderate in his ambitions, and there was not a trace of passion or enthusiasm in his nature. Such a man was not likely to inspire any strong devotion. But his temper was most kindly, equable, and contented; he was a steady friend, and he appears to have been always liked and honored in the cultivated and uncontentious society in which he delighted. His

*EDWARD GIBBON*

life was not a great one, but it was in all essentials blameless and happy. He found the work which was most congenial to him. He pursued it with admirable industry and with brilliant success, and he left behind him a book which is not likely to be forgotten while the English language endures.

*Walter Lusk*





# THOMAS CARLYLE

BY

LESLIE STEPHEN



## THOMAS CARLYLE



THE hundredth anniversary of the birth of Thomas Carlyle—(December 4th, 1795)—was lately commemorated. The house in Cheyne Walk, Chelsea, which he had occupied from 1834 till his death (February 4th, 1881), was handed over to trustees to be preserved as a public memorial. No house in the British islands has more remarkable associations. Thither Carlyle had come in his thirty-eighth year, still hardly recognized by the general public, though already regarded by a small circle as a man of extraordinary powers. There he went through the concluding years of the long struggle which ended by a hard-won and scarcely enjoyed victory. There he had been visited by almost all the most

## *HISTORIANS AND ESSAYISTS*

conspicuous men of letters of his time: by Jeffrey, Southey, and J. S. Mill; by Tennyson and Browning, the greatest poets, and by Thackeray and Dickens, the greatest novelists of his generation; by the dearest friends of his youth, Irving and Emerson and John Sterling, and by his last followers, Froude and Ruskin. There too had lived until 1866 the woman who had shared his struggles, whom he loved and admired without stint, and whom he was yet destined to remember with many bitter pangs of remorse. Their story, laid bare with singular fullness, has invested the scene of their joys and sorrows, their alienation and reconciliations, with extraordinary interest. Every one who has read the 'Reminiscences' and the later mass of biographical matter must be glad to see the "sound-proof" room, and the garden haunted by the "demon-fowls," and the other dumb witnesses of a long tragi-comedy. No one was so keenly sensitive as Carlyle to the interest of the little gleams of light which reveal our ancestors, not only stirred by the great passions, but absorbed like ourselves by the trivialities of the day. A similar interest will long attach to the scene of his own trials.

## THOMAS CARLYLE

Carlyle's life was a struggle and a warfare. Each of his books was wrenched from him, like the tale of the 'Ancient Mariner,' by a spiritual agony. The early books excited the wrath of his contemporaries, when they were not ridiculed as the grotesque outpourings of an eccentric humorist. His teaching was intended to oppose what most people take to be the general tendency of thought, and yet many who share that tendency gladly acknowledge that they owe to Carlyle a more powerful intellectual stimulus than they can attribute even to their accepted teachers. I shall try briefly to indicate the general nature of his message to mankind, without attempting to consider the soundness or otherwise of particular views.

Carlyle describes what kind of person people went to see in Cheyne Row. "The very sound of my voice," he says, "has got something savage-prophetic: I am as a John the Baptist girt about with a leather girdle, whose food is locusts and wild honey." Respectable literary society at "æsthetic tea-parties" regarded him as the Scribes and Pharisees regarded the Hebrew prophet. He came among them to

## *HISTORIANS AND ESSAYISTS*

tear the mask from their hypocritical cant. Carlyle was not externally a Diogenes. Though the son of peasants, he had the appearance and manner of a thorough gentleman in spite of all his irritable outbreaks. But he was not the less penetrated to the core with the idiosyncrasies of his class. The father, a Davie Deans of real life, had impressed the son profoundly. Carlyle had begun life on the same terms as innumerable young Scots. Strict frugality had enabled him to get a college training and reach the threshold of the ministry. His mother could look forward to the exquisite pleasure of seeing "her own bairn wag his head in a pulpit!" But at this point Carlyle's individuality first asserted itself. He could not step into any of the ordinary grooves. His college teachers appeared to him to offer "sawdust" instead of manna from heaven. The sacred formulæ of their ancestral creed had lost their savor. Words once expressive of the strongest faith were either used to utter the bigotry of narrow pedants, or were adopted only to be explained away into insipid commonplace. Carlyle shared the intellectual movement of his time too

## THOMAS CARLYLE

much to profess any reverence for what he called the "Hebrew old-clothes." Philosophers and critics had torn them to rags. His quarrel however was with the accidental embodiment, not with the spirit of the old creeds. The old morality was ingrained in his very nature; nor was he shocked, like some of his fellows, by the sternness of the Calvinistic views of the universe and life. The whole problem was with him precisely to save this living spirit. The skeptics, he thought, were, in the German phrase, "emptying out the baby with the bath." They were at war with the spirit as well as with the letter; trying to construct a Godless universe; to substitute a dead mechanism for the living organism; and therefore to kill down at the root every noble aspiration which could stimulate the conscience, or strengthen a man to bear the spectacle of the wrongs and sufferings of mankind.

The crisis of this struggle happened in 1821. After giving up the ministry, Carlyle had tried "schoolmastering," and found himself to be least fitted of mankind for a function which demands patience with stupidity. He had just glanced at the legal



## *HISTORIANS AND ESSAYISTS*

profession only to be disgusted with its chicaneries. Hack authorship was his only chance. The dyspeptic disorder which tormented him through life was tormenting him. "A rat was gnawing at the pit of his stomach." Then he was embittered by the general distress of his own class. Men out of work were threatening riots and the yeomanry being called out to suppress them. Carlyle was asked by a friend why he too did not come out with a musket. "Hm! yes," he replied, "but I haven't quite settled on which side." It was while thus distracted, that after three weeks of sleeplessness he experienced what he called his "conversion." The universe had seemed to him "void of life, of purpose, of volition, even of hostility; it was one huge and immeasurable steam-engine, rolling on in its dead indifference, to grind me limb from limb. Oh, the vast, gloomy, solitary Golgotha and mill of death!" And then he suddenly resolved to resist. Why go on trembling like a coward? — "As I so thought, there rushed a stream of fire over my whole soul, and I shook base fear away from me forever. I was strong, of unknown strength; a spirit; almost a god: ever from that time

## THOMAS CARLYLE

the temper of my misery was changed; not fear or whining sorrow was in it, but indignation and grim, fell-eyed defiance." These are the phrases of his imaginary hero in 'Sartor Resartus.' In the 'Reminiscences' he repeats the statement in his own person. He had won "an immense victory"; he had escaped from the "foul mud gods" and soared into the "eternal blue of ether" where he had "for the spiritual part ever since lived." He could look down upon his fellow creatures still "weltering in that fatal element," "pitying the religious part of them and indignant against the frivolous"; enjoying an inward and supreme happiness which still remained to him, though often "eclipsed" in later years.

To understand this crisis is to understand his whole attitude. The change was not of the purely logical kind. Carlyle was not converted by any philosophical system. Coleridge, not long before, had found in Kant and Schelling an answer to similar perplexities. Carlyle, though he respected the German metaphysicians, could never find their dogmas satisfactory to his shrewd Scottish sense. His great helper, he tells us, in the strait, was not Kant but Goethe. The con-

## *HISTORIANS AND ESSAYISTS*

trast between that serene prophet of culture and the rugged Scottish Puritan is so marked that one may be tempted to explain the influence partly by personal accident. Carlyle grew up at a time when the British public was just awaking to the existence of Germany; and not only promoted the awakening but was recognized by the great Goethe himself. He may well have been inclined in later years to exaggerate a debt due to so welcome a recognition. And yet it is intelligible that in Goethe, Carlyle saw what he most required. A man of the highest genius and a full representative of the most advanced thought could yet recognize what was elevating in the past as clearly as what was the true line of progress for us to pursue; and while casting aside the dead trappings as decidedly as Carlyle, could reach serene heights above the petty controversies where men wrangled over extinct issues. Goethe had solved the problem which vexed Carlyle's soul, and set an inspiring example of the true spirit and its great reward.

Carlyle, however, was not qualified by temperament or mental characteristics to follow Goethe's steps. If not primarily a

## THOMAS CARLYLE

reasoner, and too impatient perhaps for slow logical processes, he was also not a poet. Some of the greatest English teachers of his period embodied their conceptions of the world in poetry. Wordsworth and Shelley and Byron, in particular, were more effective representatives of the chief spiritual influences of the day than the few speculative writers. Carlyle thought for a time that he could utter himself in verse, or at least in prose fiction. He tried, only to feel his incompetence. As Froude observes, he had little ear for metrical composition. There were other and perhaps greater obstacles. A poet must be capable of detachment from the actual world in which he lives, however profound his interest in its great problems. He must be able to dwell with "seraph contemplation" and stand aside from the actual contest. To Carlyle such an attitude was partly impossible, partly contemptible. He had imbibed the Puritan aversion to æsthetic enjoyments. He had been brought up in circles where it was thought wrong for a child to read the 'Arabian Nights,' and where Milton could only obtain a doubtful admission as a versifier of the Scriptural narrative. Carlyle

## *HISTORIANS AND ESSAYISTS*

retained the prejudice. He always looked askance at poetry which had no immediate bearing upon conduct, and regarded "æsthetic" as equivalent to frivolous. "May the devil fly away with the fine arts" is a sentiment which he quotes with cordial sympathy. This view was congenial to his inborn characteristics.

One striking peculiarity was his extraordinary "receptivity" of all outward impressions. The strange irritability which he set down to the "hag Dyspepsia" made him resemble a patient in whom disease has produced a morbidly excessive sensibility. Little annoyances were magnified into tragic dimensions. The noises in a next-door house affected him as an earthquake might affect others. His memory was as retentive as his impressions were strong. Froude testifies that his account of a little trip to Paris, written forty years later without reference to memoranda, is verified down to the minutest details by contemporary letters. Scenes instantaneously photographed on his memory never faded. No one had a keener eye for country. When he visited Germany he brought back pictures of the scenes of Frederick's

## THOMAS CARLYLE

battles, which enabled him to reproduce them with such startling veracity that after reading you seem to remember the reality, not the book. In history he seeks to place before us a series of visions as distinct as actual eyesight: to show us Cromwell watching the descent of the Scottish army at Dunbar, or the human whirlpool raging round the walls of the Bastille. We—the commonplace spectators—should not, it is true, even at present see what was visible to Carlyle, any more than we see a landscape as Turner saw it. We may wish that we could. At any rate, we have the conviction of absolute truthfulness to the impression made on a powerful idiosyncrasy. We perceive, as by the help of a Rembrandt, vast chaotic breadths of gloomy confusion, with central figures thrown out by a light of extraordinary brilliancy. Carlyle, indeed, always has it in mind that what we call reality is but a film on the surface of mysterious depths. We are such stuff, to repeat his favorite quotation, as dreams are made of. Past history is a series of dreams; the magic of memory may restore them for an instant to our present consciousness. But the most

## *HISTORIANS AND ESSAYISTS*

vivid picture of whatever is not irrecoverably lost always brings, too, the pathetic sense that we are after all but ephemeral appearances in the midst of the eternities and infinities. Overwhelmed by this sense of the unsubstantiality even of the most real objects, Carlyle clutches, as it were with the energy of despair, every fading image; and tries to invest it with something of its old brightness. Carlyle was so desirous to gain this distinction of vision that he could not be happy in personal descriptions till, if possible, he had examined the portrait of his hero and satisfied himself that he could reproduce the actual bodily appearance. The face, he holds, shows the soul. And then his shrewd Scottish sagacity never deserts him. If the hero sometimes becomes, like most heroes, a little too free from human infirmities, the actors in his dramas never become mere walking gentlemen. In Dryasdust he gives us lay figures, bedizened at times with shallow paradoxes; but Carlyle always deals in genuine human nature. His judgment may not be impartial, but at least it is not nugatory. He sees the man from within and makes him a credible individual, not a mere bit of machinery worked by

## THOMAS CARLYLE

colorless formulæ. With this eye for character goes the keen sense of grim humor which keeps him in touch with reality. Little incidents bring out the absurd side of even the heroic. The most exciting scenes of his 'French Revolution' are heightened by the vision of the shivering usher who "accords the grand entries" when the ferocious mob is rushing into the palace—not "finding it convenient," as Carlyle observes, "to refuse them"; and of the gentleman who continues for an hour to "demand the arrestment of knaves and dastards"—a most comprehensive of all known petitions. Carlyle's "mannerism" is one result of this strain to be graphic. It has been attributed to readings of Jean Paul, and by Carlyle himself, partly to Irving and partly to the early talk in his father's home. It appears at any rate as soon as Carlyle gets confidence enough in himself to trust to his own modes of impression; and if it may fairly be called a mannerism, was not an affectation. It was struck out in the attempt to give most effective utterance to his genuine thought, and may be compared, as Burke said of Johnson's conversation, to the "contortions of the Sibyl."



## *HISTORIANS AND ESSAYISTS*

It is time, however, to try to say what was the prophetic message thus delivered. Carlyle, I have said, had no logical system of philosophy, and was too much of a "realist" (in one sense) to find poetry congenial. He has to preach by pictures of the past; by giving us history, though history transfused with poetry; an account of the external fact which shall reveal the real animating principle, quietly omitted by statisticians and constitutional historians. The doctrine so delivered appears to be vague. What, the ordinary believer may ask, would be left of a religion if its historical statements should turn out to be mere figments and its framework of dogmas to be nonsense? He would naturally reply, Nothing. Carlyle replies, Everything. The spirit may survive, though its whole visible embodiment should be dissolved into fiction and fallacy. But to define this spirit is obviously impossible. It represents a tone of thought, a mode of contemplating life and the world, not any distinct set of definite propositions. Carlyle was called a "mystic," and even, as he says, was made into a "mystic school." We may accept the phrase, so far as mysticism means the sub-

THOMAS CARLYLE

stitution of a "logic of the heart" for a "logic of the head"—an appeal to sentiment rather than to any definite reasoning process. The "mystic" naturally recognizes the inner light as shining through many different and even apparently contradictory forms. But most mystics retain, in a new sense perhaps, the ancient formulæ. Carlyle rejected them so markedly that he shocked many believers, otherwise sympathetic. His early friend Irving, who tried to restore life to the old forms, and many who accepted Coleridge as their spiritual guide, were scandalized by his utterances. He thought, conversely, that they were still masquerading in "Hebrew old-clothes," or were even like the apes who went on chattering by the banks of the Dead Sea, till they ceased to be human. He regards the "Oxford movement" with simple contempt. His dictum that Newman had "no more brain than a moderate-sized rabbit" must have been followed, as no one will doubt who heard him talk, by one of those gigantic explosions of laughter which were signals of humorous exaggeration. But it meant in all seriousness that he held New-

## *HISTORIANS AND ESSAYISTS*

man to be reviving superstitions unworthy of the smallest allowance of brain.

Yet Carlyle's untiring denunciation of "shams" and "unrealities" of this, as of other varieties, does not mean unqualified antipathy. He feels that the attempt to link the living spirit to the dead externals is a fatal enterprise. That may be now a stifling incumbrance, which was once the only possible symbol of a living belief. Accordingly, though Carlyle's insistence upon the value of absolute intellectual truthfulness is directed against this mode of thought, his attack upon the opposite error is more passionate and characteristic. The 'Sartor Resartus,' his first complete book (1833-4), announced and tried to explain his "conversion." To many readers it still seems his best work, as it certainly contains some of his noblest passages. It was unpopular in England, and (an Englishman must say it with regret) seems to have been first appreciated in America. It gave indeed many sharp blows at English society: it expresses his contempt for the upper literary strata, who like Jeffrey complained of him for being so "desperately in ear-

## THOMAS CARLYLE

nest"; and for the authors, who were not "prophets," but mere caterers to ephemeral amusement. But the satire, I cannot but think, is not quite happy. The humor of the "Clothes Philosophy" is a little strained; to me, I confess, rather tiresome: and the impressive passages just those where he forgets it.

His real power became obvious beyond all cavil on the publication of the 'French Revolution' (1837). Not for a hundred years, he declared, had the public received any book that "came more direct and flamingly from the heart of a living man." That expresses, as I think, the truth. The book is not to be "read for information." The facts would now require much restatement; and moreover, the narrative is too apt to overleap prosaic but necessary facts in order to fasten upon the picturesque passages. But considered as what it is, a "prose epic," a moving panorama, drawn with astonishing force and perception of the tremendous tragi-comedy involved, it is unequalled in English literature. The doctrine inculcated is significant. Carlyle's sympathies were in one sense with the Rev-

## *HISTORIANS AND ESSAYISTS*

olution. He felt, he says, that the Radicals were "guild-brothers," while the Whigs were mere "amateurs." He was even more thoroughly convinced than the Radicals that a thoroughgoing demolition of the old order was essential. The Revolution was but the first volcanic outburst of the great forces still active below the surface. Europe, he says ('Chartism'), lay "hag-ridden" and "quack-ridden." The quack is the most hideous of hags; he is a "falsehood incarnate." To blow him and his to the four winds was the first necessity. The French Revolution was "the inevitable stern end of much: the fearful but also wonderful, indispensable, and sternly beneficent beginning of much." So far, Carlyle was far more in agreement with Paine than with Burke. But what was to follow when the ground was cleared? When you have cut off your king's head and confiscated the estates of the nobility and the church, you have only begun. A new period is to be born with death-throes and birth-throes, and there are, he guesses ('French Revolution,' Book iv., Chapter 4), some two centuries of fighting before "Democracy go

## THOMAS CARLYLE

through its dire, most baleful stage of 'Quackocracy.'» The Radicals represent this coming "Quackocracy." What was their root error? Briefly (I try to expound, not to enlarge), that they were materialists. Their aim was low. They desired simply a multiplication of physical comforts, or as he puts it, a boundless supply of "pigs-wash." Their means, too, were futile. Society, on their showing, was a selfish herd hungering for an equal distribution of pigs-wash. They put unlimited faith in the mere mechanism of constitution-mongering; in ballot-boxes and manipulation of votes and contrivances by which a number of mean and selfish passions might be somehow so directed as to balance each other. It is not by any such devices that society can really be regenerated. You must raise men's souls, not alter their conventions. They must not simply abolish kings, but learn to recognize the true king, the man who has the really divine right of superior strength and wisdom, not the sham divine right of obsolete tradition. You require not paper rules, but a new spirit which spontaneously recognizes the voice of God. The true secret of life must be to him, as to

## *HISTORIANS AND ESSAYISTS*

every "mystic," that we should follow the dictates of the inner light which speaks in different dialects to all of us.

But this implies a difficulty. Carlyle, spite of his emergence into "blue ether," was constitutionally gloomy. He was more alive than any man since Swift to the dark side of human nature. The dullness of mankind weighed upon him like a nightmare. "Mostly fools" is his pithy verdict upon the race at large. Nothing then could be more idle than the dream of the revolutionists that the voice of the people could be itself the voice of God. From millions of fools you can by no constitutional machinery extract anything but folly. Where then is the escape? The millions, he says (essay on Johnson), "roll hither and thither, whithersoever they are led"; they seem "all sightless and slavish," with little but "animal instincts." The hope is that, here and there, are scattered the men of power and of insight, the heaven-sent leaders, and it is upon loyalty to them and capacity for recognizing and obeying them that the future of the race really depends. This was the moral of the lectures on 'Hero Worship' (1840). Odin, Mahomet,

## THOMAS CARLYLE

Dante, Shakespeare, Luther, Cromwell, and Napoleon are types of the great men who now and then visit the earth as prophets or rulers. They are the brilliant centres of light in the midst of the surrounding darkness; and in loyal recognition of their claims lies our security for all external progress. By what signs, do you ask, can they be recognized? There can be no sign. You can see the light if you have eyes; but no other faculty can supply the want of eyesight. And hence arise some remarkable points both of difference from and coincidence with popular beliefs.

In the 'Chartism,' 'Past and Present,' and 'Latter-Day Pamphlets' (1839, 1843, and 1850), Carlyle applied his theories to the problems of the day. They had the disadvantage which generally attaches to the writings of an outsider in politics. They were, said the average reader, "unpractical." Carlyle could not recommend any definite measures; an objection easy to bring against a man who urges rather a change of spirit than of particular measures. Yet it is noticeable that he recommends much that has since become popular. Much of his language might be used by modern Social-



## HISTORIANS AND ESSAYISTS

ists. In 'Past and Present,' for example (Book iii., Chapter 8), he gives the principle of "land nationalization." The great capitalist is to be turned into a "captain of industry," and government is to undertake to organize labor, to protect health, and to enforce education. Carlyle so far sympathizes with the Socialist, not only as agreeing that the great end of government is the raising of the poor, but as denouncing the *laissez-faire* doctrine. The old-fashioned English Radical had regarded all government as a necessary evil, to be minimized as much as possible. When it had armed the policemen, it had fulfilled its whole duty. But this, according to Carlyle, was to leave the "dull multitude" to drift into chaos. Government should rest upon the loyalty of the lower to the higher. Order is essential; and good order means the spontaneous obedience to the heaven-sent hero. He, when found, must supply the guiding and stimulating force. The Socialist, like Carlyle, desires a strong government, but not the government of the "hero." Government of which the moving force comes from above instead of below will be, he thinks, a government of mere force.

## THOMAS CARLYLE

And here occurs the awkward problem to which Carlyle is constantly referring. He was generally accused of identifying "right" with "might." Against this interpretation he always protested. Right and Might, he says often, are in the long run identical. That which is right and that alone is ultimately lasting. Your rights are the expression of the divine will; and for that reason, whatever endures must be right. Work lasts so far as it is based upon eternal foundations. The might, therefore, is in the long run the expression of the right. The Napoleonic empire, according to a favorite illustration, could not last because it was founded upon injustice. The two tests then must coincide: what is good proves itself by lasting, and what lasts, lasts because good; but the test of endurance cannot, it is clear, be applied when it is wanted. Hence arises an ambiguity which often gives to Carlyle the air of a man worshiping mere success; when, if we take his own interpretation, he takes the success to be the consequence, not the cause, of the rightness. The hero is the man who sees the fact and disregards the conventional fiction; but for the moment he looks very like the man who disregards principles and attends to his own interest.

## *HISTORIANS AND ESSAYISTS*

Here again Carlyle approximates to a doctrine to which he was most averse, the theory of the struggle for existence and the survival of the fittest. The Darwinian answers in this way Carlyle's problem, how it is to come to pass that the stupidity of the masses comes to blunder into a better order? Here and there, as in his accounts of the way in which the intensely stupid British public managed to blunder into the establishment of a great empire, Carlyle seems to fall in with the Darwinian view. That view shocked him because he thought it mechanical. To him the essence of history was to be found not in the blind striving of the dull, but in the lives of great men. They represent the incarnate wisdom which must guide all wholesome aspiration. History is really the biography of the heroes. All so-called philosophies of history, attempts to discover general laws and to dispense with the agency of great men, are tainted with materialism. They would substitute "blind laws" for the living spirit which really guides the development of the race. But if you ask how your hero is to be known, the only answer can be, Know him at your peril.

Carlyle's most elaborate books, the 'Cromwell' and the 'Frederick,' are designed to

## THOMAS CARLYLE

give an explicit answer to the "right" and "might" problem. Carlyle in both cases seems to be toiling amidst the dust-heaps of some ancient ruin, painfully disinterring the shattered and defaced fragments of a noble statue and reconstructing it to be hereafter placed in a worthy Valhalla. Cromwell, according to the vulgar legend, was a mere hypocrite, and Frederick a mere cynical conqueror. The success of both—that is his intended moral—was in proportion to the clearness with which they recognized the eternal laws of the universe. Cromwell probably is the more satisfactory hero, as more really sympathetic to his admirer. But each requires an interpreter. Cromwell's gifts did not lie in the direction of lucid utterance; and Frederick, if he could have read, would certainly have scorned, the doctrine of his eulogist. Carlyle, that is, has to dig out in the actions of great men a true significance, certainly not obvious to the actors themselves. Their recognition of the eternal laws was in one case embodied in obsolete formulæ, and in the other, it might seem, altogether unconscious. The hero's recognition of Divine purposes does not imply then that his own

## *HISTORIANS AND ESSAYISTS*

vision is purged from error, or that his aim is distinctly realized. He may, like Mahomet or the Abbot Sampson, be full of superstition. His "veracity" does not mean that his beliefs are true; only that they are sincere and such a version of the truth as is possible in his dialect. This is connected with Carlyle's constant insistence upon the superiority of silence to speech. The Divine light shines through many distracting media; it enlightens many who do not consciously perceive it. It may be recognized because it gives life; because the work to which it prompts is lasting. But even the hero who tries to utter himself is sure to interpolate much that is ephemeral, confused, and imperfect; and speech in general represents the mere perplexed gabble of men who take words for thought, and raise a hopeless clamor which drowns the still small voice of true inspiration. If men are mostly fools, their talk is mostly folly; forming a wild incoherent Babel in which it is hard to pick out the few scattered words of real meaning. Carlyle has been ridiculed for preaching silence in so many words; but then Carlyle was speaking the truth; and of that, he fully admits, we can

## THOMAS CARLYLE

never have too much. The hero may be a prophet, or a man of letters. He is bound to speak seriously, though not to be literally silent; and his words must be judged not by the momentary pleasure, but by their ultimate influence on life.

Carlyle's message to his fellows, which I have tried imperfectly to summarize, may be condemned on grounds of taste and of morality. Translated into logical formulæ it becomes inconsistent, and it embodies some narrow prejudices in exaggerated terms. Yet I think that it has been useful even by the shock it has given to commonplace optimism. It has been far more useful because in his own dialect, Carlyle—as I think—expresses some vital truths with surpassing force. Whatever our creeds, religious or political, he may stimulate our respect for veracity, in the form of respect for honest work or contempt for hypocritical conventions; our loyalty to all great leaders in the worlds both of thought and action; and our belief that to achieve any real progress, something is required infinitely deeper than any mere change in the superficial arrangements of society. These lessons are expressed, too, as the merely literary

## *HISTORIANS AND ESSAYISTS*

critic must admit, by a series of historical pictures, so vivid and so unique in character that for many readers they are in the full sense fascinating. They are revelations of new aspects of the world, never, when once observed, to be forgotten. And finally, I may add that Carlyle's autobiographical writings—in which we must include the delightful 'Life of Sterling'—show the same qualities in a shape which, if sometimes saddening, is profoundly interesting. No man was more reticent in his life, though he has been made to deliver a posthumous confession of extraordinary fullness. We hear all the groans once kept within the walls of Cheyne Row. After making all allowance for the fits of temper, the harshness of judgment, and the willful exaggeration, we see at last a man who under extraordinary difficulties was unflinchingly faithful to what he took to be his vocation, and struggled through a long life, full of anxieties and vexations, to turn his genius to the best account.

*Leslie Stephen*

**RALPH WALDO EMERSON**

**BY**

**RICHARD GARNETT**





## RALPH WALDO EMERSON



“NOTEWORTHY also,” says Carlyle, “and serviceable for the progress of this same Individual, wilt thou find his subdivision into Generations.”

It is indeed the fact that the course of human history admits of being marked off into periods, which, from their average duration and the impulse communicated to them by those who enter upon adolescence along with them, may be fitly denominated generations, especially when their opening and closing are signalized by great events which serve as historical landmarks. No such event, indeed, short of the Day of Judgment or a universal deluge, can serve as an absolute line of demarcation; nothing can be more certain than that history and

## *HISTORIANS AND ESSAYISTS*

human life are a perpetual Becoming; and that, although the progress of development is frequently so startling and unforeseen as to evoke the poet's exclamation,—

“New endless growth surrounds on every side,  
Such as we deemed not earth could ever bear,”—

this growth is but development after all. The association of historical periods with stages in the mental development of man is nevertheless too convenient to be surrendered; the vision is cleared and the grasp strengthened by the perception of a well-defined era in American history, commencing with the election of Andrew Jackson to the Presidency in 1828 and closing with the death of Abraham Lincoln in 1865,—a period exactly corresponding with one in English history measured from the death of Lord Liverpool, the typical representative of a bygone political era in the prime of other years, and that of Lord Palmerston, another such representative, in the latter. The epoch thus bounded almost precisely corresponds to the productive period of the two great men who, more than any contemporaries, have stood in the conscious attitude of teachers of their age. With such men

## *RALPH WALDO EMERSON*

as Tennyson and Browning, vast as their influence has been, the primary impulse has not been didactic, but artistic; Herbert Spencer, George Eliot, Matthew Arnold, and others, have been chiefly operative upon the succeeding generation; Mill and the elder Newman rather address special classes than the people at large; and Ruskin and Kingsley would have willingly admitted that however eloquent the expression of their teaching, its originality mainly consisted in the application of Carlyle's ideas to subjects beyond Carlyle's range. Carlyle and Emerson, therefore, stand forth like Goethe and Schiller as the Dioscuri of their period; the two men to whom beyond others its better minds look for guidance, and who had the largest share in forming the minds from which the succeeding generation was to take its complexion. Faults and errors they had; but on the whole it may be said that nations have rarely been more fortunate in their instructors than the two great English-speaking peoples during the age of Carlyle and Emerson. Of Carlyle this is not the place to speak further; but writing on Emerson, it will be necessary to exhibit what we conceive to have been the special value of his

## *HISTORIANS AND ESSAYISTS*

teaching; and to attempt some description of the man himself, in indication of the high place claimed for him.

It has been said of some great man of marked originality that he was the sole voice among many echoes. This cannot be said of Emerson; his age was by no means deficient in original voices. But his may be said with truth to have been the chief verbal utterance in an age of authorship. It is a trite remark, that many of the men of thought whose ideas have most influenced the world have shown little inclination for literary composition. The president of a London freethinking club in Goldsmith's time supposed himself to be in possession of the works of Socrates, no less than of those of "Tully and Cicero," but no other trace of their existence has come to light. Had Emerson lived in any age but his own, it is doubtful whether, any more than Socrates, he would have figured as an author. "I write," he tells Carlyle, "with very little system, and as far as regards composition, with most fragmentary result—paragraphs incomprehensible, each sentence an infinitely repellent particle." We also hear of his going forth into the

*RALPH WALDO EMERSON*

woods to hunt a thought as a boy might hunt a butterfly, except that the thought had flown with him from home, and that his business was not so much to capture it as to materialize it and make it tangible. This peculiarity serves to classify Emerson among the ancient sages, men like Socrates and Buddha, whose instructions were not merely oral but unmethodical and unsystematic; who spoke as the casual emergency of the day dictated, and left their observations to be collected by their disciples. An excellent plan in so far as it accomplishes the endowment of the sage's word with his own individuality; exceptionable when a doubt arises whether the utterance belongs to the master or the disciple, and in the case of diametrically opposite versions, whether Socrates has been represented more truly by the prose of Xenophon or the poetry of Plato. We may be thankful that the spirit of Emerson's age, and the exigencies of his own affairs, irresistibly impelled him to write: nevertheless the fact remains that with him Man Thinking is not so much Man Writing as Man Speaking, and that although the omnipotent machinery of the

## *HISTORIANS AND ESSAYISTS*

modern social system caught him too, and forced him into line with the rest, we have in him a nearer approach to the voice, apart from the disturbing and modifying habits of literary composition, than in any other eminent modern thinker. This annuls one of the most weighty criticisms upon Emerson, so long as he is regarded merely as an author,—his want of continuity, and consequent want of logic. Had he attempted to establish a philosophical system, this would have been fatal. But such an undertaking is of all things furthest from his thoughts. He does not seek to demonstrate, he announces. Ideas have come to him which, as viewed by the inward light, appear important and profitable. He brings these forward to be tested by the light of other men. He does not seek to connect these ideas together, except in so far as their common physiognomy bespeaks their common parentage. Nor does he seek to fortify them by reasoning, or subject them to any test save the faculty by which the unprejudiced soul discerns good from evil. If his jewel will scratch glass, it is sufficiently evinced a diamond.

It follows that although Emerson did not

*RALPH WALDO EMERSON*

write most frequently or best in verse, he is, as regards the general constitution of his intellect, rather to be classed with poets than with philosophers. Poetry cannot indeed dispense with the accurate observation of nature and mankind, but poetic genius essentially depends on intuition and inspiration. There is no gulf between the philosopher and the poet; some of the greatest of poets have also been among the most powerful of reasoners; but their claim to poetical rank would not have been impaired if their ratiocination had been ever so illogical. Similarly, a great thinker may have no more taste for poetry than was vouchsafed to Darwin or the elder Mill, without any impeachment of his power of intellect. The two spheres of action are fundamentally distinct, though the very highest geniuses, such as Shakespeare and Goethe, have sometimes almost succeeded in making them appear as one. To determine to which of them a man actually belongs, we must look beyond the externalities of literary form, and inquire whether he obtains his ideas by intuition, or by observation and reflection. No mind will be either entirely intuitive or entirely reflective, but there will usually be



## *HISTORIANS AND ESSAYISTS*

a decided inclination to one or other of the processes; and in the comparatively few cases in which thoughts and feelings seem to come to it unconsciously, as leaves to a tree, we may consider that we have a poet, though perhaps not a writer of poetry. If indeed the man writes at all, he will very probably write prose, but this prose will be impregnated with poetic quality. From this point of view we are able to set Emerson much higher than if we regarded him simply as a teacher. He is greater as the American Wordsworth than as the American Carlyle. We shall understand his position best by comparing him with other men of genius who are poets too, but not pre-eminently so. In beauty of language and power of imagination, John Henry Newman and James Martineau, though they have written little in verse, yield to few poets. But throughout all their writings the didactic impulse is plainly the preponderating one, their poetry merely auxiliary and ornamental; hence they are not reckoned among poets. With Emerson the case is reversed: the revealer is first in him, the reasoner second; oral speech is his most congenial form of expression,

## *RALPH WALDO EMERSON*

and he submits to appear in print because the circumstances of his age render print the most effectual medium for the dissemination of his thought. It will be observed that whenever possible he resorts to the medium of oration or lecture; it may be further remarked that his essays, often originally delivered as lectures, are very like his discourses, and his discourses very like his essays. In neither, so far as regards the literary form of the entire composition, distinguished from the force and felicity of individual sentences, can he be considered as a classic model. The essay need not be too severely logical, yet a just conception of its nature requires a more harmonious proportion and more symmetrical construction, as well as a more consistent and intelligent direction towards a single definite end, than we usually find in Emerson. The orator is less easy to criticize than the essayist, for oratory involves an element of personal magnetism which resists all critical analysis. Hence posterity frequently reverses (or rather seems to reverse, for the decision upon a speech mutilated of voice and action cannot be really conclusive) the verdicts of contemporaries upon oratory.

## *HISTORIANS AND ESSAYISTS*

“What will our descendants think of the Parliamentary oratory of our age?” asked a contemporary of Burke’s, “when they are told that in his own time this man was accounted neither the first, nor the second, nor even the third speaker?” Transferred to the tribunal of the library, Burke’s oratory bears away the palm from Pitt and Fox and Sheridan; yet, unless we had heard the living voices of them all, it would be unsafe for us to challenge the contemporary verdict. We cannot say, with the lover in Goethe, that the word printed appears dull and soulless, but it certainly wants much which conduced to the efficacy of the word spoken:—

“Ach wie traurig sieht in Lettern,  
Schwarz auf weiss, das Lied mich an,  
Das aus deinem Mund vergöttern,  
Das ein Herz zerreißen kann!”

Emerson’s orations are no less delightful and profitable reading than his essays, so long as they can be treated as his essays were intended to be treated when they came into print; that is, read deliberately, with travelings backward when needed, and frequent pauses of thought. But if we

## *RALPH WALDO EMERSON*

consider them as discourses to be listened to, we shall find some difficulty in reconciling their popularity and influence with their apparent disconnectedness, and some reason to apprehend that, occasional flashes of epigram excepted, they must speedily have passed from the minds of the hearers. The apparent defect was probably remedied in delivery by the magnetic power of the speaker; not that sort of power which "wields at will the fierce democracy," but that which convinces the hearer that he is listening to a message from a region not as yet accessible to himself. The impassioned orator usually provokes the suspicion that he is speaking from a brief. Not so Emerson: above all other speakers he inspires the confidence that he declares a thing to be, not because he wishes, but because he perceives it to be so. His quiet, unpretending, but perfectly unembarrassed manner, as of a man with a message which he simply delivers and goes away, must have greatly aided to supply the absence of vigorous reasoning and skillful oratorical construction. We could not expect a spirit commissioned to teach us to condescend

## *HISTORIANS AND ESSAYISTS*

to such methods; and Emerson's discourse, whether in oration or essay, though by no means deficient in human feeling nor of the "blessed Glendoveer" order, frequently does sound like that of a being from another sphere, simply because he derived his ideas from a higher world; as must always be the case with the man of spiritual, not of course with the man of practical genius. It matters nothing whether this is really so, or whether what wears the aspect of imparted revelation is but a fortifying of the natural eye, qualifying it to look a little deeper than neighboring eyes into things around. In either case the person so endowed stands a degree nearer to the essential truth of things than his fellows; and the consciousness of the fact, transpiring through his personality, gives him a weight which might otherwise seem inexplicable. Nothing can be more surprising than the deference with which the learned and intelligent contemporaries of the humble and obscure Spinoza resort to his judgment before he has so much as written a book.

This estimate of Emerson as an Ameri-

*RALPH WALDO EMERSON*

can Wordsworth, one who like Wordsworth not merely enforced but practically demonstrated the proposition that

“One impulse from a vernal wood  
May teach you more of man,  
Of moral evil and of good,  
Than all the sages can,

is controverted by many who can see in him nothing but a polisher and stringer of epigrammatic sayings. It is impossible to argue with any who cannot recognize the deep vitality of ‘Nature,’ of the two series of Essays first published, and of most of the early orations and discourses; but it may be conceded that Emerson’s fountain of inspiration was no more perennial than Wordsworth’s, and that in his latter years his gift of epigrammatic statement enabled him to avoid both the Scylla and the Charybdis of men of genius whose fount of inspiration has run low. In some such cases, such as Wordsworth’s, the author simply goes on producing, with less and less geniality at every successive effort. In others, such as Browning’s, he escapes inanity by violent exaggeration of his characteristic mannerisms. Neither of these

## *HISTORIANS AND ESSAYISTS*

remarks applies to Emerson: he does not, in ceasing to be original, become insipid, nor can it be said that he is any more mannered at the last than at the first. This is a clear proof that his peculiarity of speech is not mannerism but manner; that consequently he is not an artificial writer, and that, since the treatment of his themes as he has chosen to treat them admits of no compromise between nature and rhetoric, he has the especial distinction of simplicity where simplicity is difficult and rare. That such is the case will appear from an examination of his earlier and more truly prophetic writings.

Of these, the first in importance as in time is the tract 'Nature,' commenced in 1833, rewritten, completed, and published in 1836. Of all Emerson's writings this is the most individual, and the most adapted for a general introduction to his ideas. These ideas are not in fact peculiar to him; and yet the little book is one of the most original ever written and one of those most likely to effect an intellectual revolution in the mind capable of apprehending it. The reason is mainly the intense vitality of the manner, and the translation of abstract ar-

## *RALPH WALDO EMERSON*

guments into concrete shapes of witchery and beauty. It contains scarcely a sentence that is not beautiful,—not with the cold beauty of art, but with the radiance and warmth of feeling. Its dominant note is rapture, like the joy of one who has found an enchanted realm, or who has convinced himself that old stories deemed too beautiful to be true are true indeed. Yet it is exempt from extravagance, the splendor of the language is chastened by taste, and the gladness and significance of the author's announcements would justify an even more ardent enthusiasm. They may be briefly summed up as the statements that Nature is not mechanical, but vital; that the Universe is not dead, but alive; that God is not remote, but omnipresent. There was of course no novelty in these assertions, nor can Emerson bring them by a hair's-breadth nearer demonstration than they had always been. He simply re-states them in a manner entirely his own, and with a charm not perhaps surpassing that with which others had previously invested them, but peculiar and dissimilar. Everything really Emersonian in Emerson's teaching may be said to spring out of this little



## *HISTORIANS AND ESSAYISTS*

book: so copious, however, were the corollaries deducible from principles apparently so simple, that the flowers veiled the tree; and precious as the tract is, as the first and purest draught of the new wine, it is not the most practically efficient of his works, and might probably have passed unperceived if it had not been reinforced by a number of auxiliary compositions, some produced under circumstances which could not fail to provoke wide discussion and consequent notoriety. The principles unfolded in 'Nature' might probably have passed with civil acquiescence if Emerson had been content with the mere statement; but he insisted on carrying them logically out, and this could not be done without unsettling every school of thought at the time prevalent in America. The Divine omnipresence, for example, was admitted in words by all except materialists and anti-theists; but if, as Emerson maintained, this involved the conception of the Universe as a Divine incarnation, this in its turn involved an optimistic view of the universal scheme totally inconsistent with the Calvinism still dominant in American theology. If all existence was a Divine emanation, no part

## *RALPH WALDO EMERSON*

of it could be more sacred than another part,—which at once abolished the mystic significance of religious ceremonies so dear to the Episcopalians; while the immediate contact of the Universe with the Deity was no less incompatible with the miraculous interferences on which Unitarianism reposed its faith. Such were some of the most important negative results of Emerson's doctrines; in their positive aspect, by asserting the identity of natural and spiritual laws, they invested the former with the reverence hitherto accorded only to the latter, and restored to a mechanical and prosaic society the piety with which men in the infancy of history had defied the forces of Nature. Substantially, except for the absence of any definite relation to literary art, Emerson's mission was very similar to Wordsworth's; but by natural temperament and actual situation he wanted the thousand links which bound Wordsworth to the past, and eventually made the sometime innovator the patron of a return towards the Middle Ages.

Emerson had no wish to redress, and, almost alone among thinkers who have reached an advanced age, betrays no symp-

## *HISTORIANS AND ESSAYISTS*

tom of reaction throughout the whole of his career. The reason may be, that his scrupulous fairness and frank conceptions to the Conservative cast of thought had left him nothing to retract or atone for. He seems to have started on his journey through life with his Conservatism and Liberalism ready made up, taking with him just as much of either as he wanted. This is especially manifest in the discourse 'The Conservative' (1841), in which he deliberately weighs conservative against progressive tendencies, impersonates each in an imaginary interlocutor, and endeavors to display their respective justification and shortcomings. Nothing can be more rigidly equitable or more thoroughly sane than his estimate; and as the issues between conservatism and reform have broadened and deepened, time has only added to its value. It is a perfect manual for thoughtful citizens, desirous of understanding the questions that underlie party issues, and is especially to be commended to young and generous minds, liable to misguidance in proportion to their generosity.

This celebrated discourse is one of a group including one still more celebrated,

## *RALPH WALDO EMERSON*

the address to the graduating class of Divinity College, Cambridge, published as 'The Christian Teacher' (1838). This, says Mr. Cabot, seems to have been struck off at a heat, which perhaps accounts for its nearer approach than any of his other addresses to the standard of what is usually recognized as eloquence. Eloquent in a sense Emerson usually was, but here is something which could transport a fit audience with enthusiasm. It also possessed the power of awakening the keenest antagonism; but censure has long since died away, and nothing that Emerson wrote has been more thoroughly adopted into the creed of those with whom external observances and material symbols find no place. Equally epoch-making in a different way was the oration on 'Man Thinking, or the American Scholar' (1837), entitled by Dr. Holmes "our intellectual Declaration of Independence," and of which Mr. Lowell says: "We were socially and intellectually moored to English thought, till Emerson cut the cable and gave us a chance at the dangers and glories of blue water." In these three great discourses, and in a less measure in 'The Transcendentalist' and 'Man the Reformer' (both

## *HISTORIANS AND ESSAYISTS*

in 1841), America may boast of possessing works of the first class, which could have been produced in no other country, and which—even though, in Emerson's own phrase, wider circles should come to be drawn around them—will remain permanent landmarks in intellectual history.

These discourses may be regarded as Emerson's public proclamations of his opinions; but he is probably more generally known and more intimately beloved by the two unobtrusive volumes of *Essays*, originally prefaced for England by Carlyle. Most of these, indeed, were originally delivered as lectures, but to small audiences, and with little challenge to public attention. It may be doubted whether they would have succeeded as lectures but for the personal magnetism of the speaker; but their very defects aid them with the reader, who, once fascinated by their beauty of phrase and depth of spiritual insight, imbibes their spirit all the more fully for his ceaseless effort to mend their deficient logic with his own. Like Love in Dante's sonnet, Emerson enters into and blends with the reader, and his influence will often be found most potent where it is least acknowl-

## *RALPH WALDO EMERSON*

edged. Each of the twenty may be regarded as a fuller working out of some subject merely hinted at in 'Nature,'—statues, as it were, for niches left vacant in the original edifice. The most important and pregnant with thought are 'History,' where the same claim is preferred for history as for the material world, that it is not dead but alive; 'Self-Reliance,' a most vigorous assertion of a truth which Emerson was apt to carry to extremes,—the majesty of the individual soul; 'Compensation,' an exposition of the universe as the incarnation of unerring truth and absolute justice; 'Love,' full of beauty and rapture, yet almost chilling to the young by its assertion of what is nevertheless true, that even Love in its human semblance only subserves ulterior ends; 'Circles,' the demonstration that this circumstance is no way peculiar to Love, that there can be nothing ultimate, final, or unrelated to ulterior purpose,—nothing around which, in Emersonian phrase, you cannot draw a circle; 'The Over-Soul,' a prose hymn dedicated to an absolutely spiritual religion; 'The Poet,' a celebration of Poetry as co-extensive with Imagination, and in the highest sense with Reason also; 'Experience'

## *HISTORIANS AND ESSAYISTS*

and 'Character,' valuable essays, but evincing that the poetical impulse was becoming spent, and that Emerson's mind was more and more tending to questions of conduct. The least satisfactory of the essays is that on 'Art,' where he is only great on the negative side, Art's inevitable limitations. The æsthetical faculty, which contemplates Beauty under the restraints of Form, was evidently weak in him.

'Representative Men,' Emerson's next work of importance (1845), shows that his parachute was descending; but he makes a highly successful compromise by taking up original ideas as reflected in the actions and thoughts of great typical men, one remove only from originality of exposition on his own part. The treatment is necessarily so partial as to exercise a distorting influence on his representation of the men themselves. Napoleon, for example, may have been from a certain point of view the hero of the middle class, as Emerson chooses to consider him; but he was much besides, which cannot even be hinted at in a short lecture. The representation of such a hero, nevertheless, whether the character precisely fitted Napoleon or not, is highly

## *RALPH WALDO EMERSON*

spirited and suggestive; and the same may be said of the other lectures. That on Shakespeare is the least satisfying, the consummate art which is half Shakespeare's greatness making little appeal to Emerson. He appears also at variance with himself when he speaks of Shakespeare's existence as "obscure and profane," such a healthy, homely, unambitious life being precisely what he elsewhere extols as a model. The first lecture of the series, 'Uses of Great Men,' would seem to have whispered the message more vociferously repeated by Walt Whitman.

Emerson was yet to write two books of worth, not illumed with "the light that never was on sea or land," but valuable complements to his more characteristic work, and important to mankind as an indisputable proof that a teacher need not be distrusted in ordinary things because he is a mystic and a poet. 'The Conduct of Life' (1851), far inferior to his earlier writings in inspiration, is yet one of the most popular and widely influential of his works because condescending more nearly to the needs and intelligence of the average reader. It is not less truly Emersonian, less fully impregnated



## *HISTORIANS AND ESSAYISTS*

with his unique genius; but the themes discussed are less interesting, and the glory and the beauty of the diction are much subdued. Without it, we should have been in danger of regarding Emerson too exclusively as a transcendental seer, and ignoring the solid ground of good sense and practical sagacity from which the waving forests of his imagery drew their nutriment. It greatly promoted his fame and influence by coming into the hands of successive generations of readers who naturally inquired for his last book, found the author, with surprise, so much nearer their own intellectual position than they had been led to expect, and gradually extended the indorsement which they could not avoid according to the book, to the author himself. When the Reason and the Understanding have agreed to legitimate the pretensions of a speculative thinker, these may be considered stable. Emerson insensibly took rank with the other American institutions; it seemed natural to all, that without the retractation or modification of a syllable on his part, Harvard should in 1866 confer her highest honors upon him whose address to her Divinity School had aroused such fierce opposition

## *RALPH WALDO EMERSON*

in 1838. Emerson's views, being pure intuitions, rarely admitted of alteration in essence, though supplement or limitation might sometimes be found advisable. The Civil War, for instance, could not but convince him that in his zeal for the independence of the individual he had dangerously impaired the necessary authority of government. His attitude throughout this great contest was the ideal of self-sacrificing patriotism: in truth, it might be said of him, as of so few men of genius, that you could not find a situation for him, public or private, whose obligations he was not certain to fulfill. He had previously given proof of his insight into another nation by his 'English Traits,' mainly founded upon the visit he had paid to England in 1847-8: a book to be read with equal pleasure and profit by the nation of which and by the nation for which it was written; while its insight, sanity, and kindliness justify what has been said on occasion of another of Emerson's writings: "The ideologist judges the man of action more shrewdly and justly than the man of action judges the ideologist." This was the secret of Napoleon's bitter animosity to "ideolo-

## *HISTORIANS AND ESSAYISTS*

gists": he felt instinctively that the man of ideas could see into him and through him, and recognize and declare his place in the scheme of the universe as an astronomer might a planet's. He would have wished to be an incalculable, original, elemental force; and it vexed him to feel that he was something whose course could be mapped and whose constitution defined by a mere mortal like a Coleridge or a De Staël, who could treat him like the incarnate Thought he was, and show him, as Emerson showed the banker, "that he also was a phantom walking and working amid phantoms, and that he need only ask a question or two beyond his daily questions to find his solid universe proving dim and impalpable before his sense."

The later writings of Emerson, though exhibiting few or no traces of mental decay, are in general repetitions or at least confirmations of what had once been announcements and discoveries. This can scarcely be otherwise when the mind's productions are derived from its own stuff and substance. Emerson's contemporary Longfellow could renovate and indeed augment his poetical power by resort in his old age

## *RALPH WALDO EMERSON*

to Italy; but change of environment brings no reinforcement of energy to the speculative thinker. Events however may come to his aid; and when Emerson was called before the people by a momentous incident like the death of President Lincoln, he rose fully to the height of the occasion. His last verses, also, are among his best. We have spoken of him as primarily and above all things a poet; but his claim to that great distinction is to be sought rather in the poetical spirit which informs all his really inspired writings, than in the comparatively restricted region of rhyme and metre. It might have been otherwise. Many of his detached passages are the very best things in verse yet written in America; but though a maker, he is not a fashioner. The artistic instinct is deficient in him; he is seldom capable of combining his thoughts into a harmonious whole. No one's expression is better when he aims at conveying a single thought with gnomic terseness, as in the mottoes to his essays; few are more obscure when he attempts continuous composition. Sometimes, as in the admirable stanzas on the Bunker Hill

## *HISTORIANS AND ESSAYISTS*

dedication, the subject has enforced the due clearness and compression of thought; sometimes, as in the glorious lines beginning "Not from a vain or shallow thought," he is guided unerringly by a divine rapture; in one instance at least, 'The Rhodora,' where he is writing of beauty, the instinct of beauty has given his lines the symmetry as well as the sparkle of the diamond. Could he have always written like this, he would have been supreme among American poets in metre; as it is, comparison seems unfair both to him and to them.

What we have to learn from Emerson is chiefly the Divine immanence in the world, with all its corollaries; no discovery of his, but re-stated by him in the fashion most suitable to his age, and with a cogency and attractiveness rivaled by no contemporary. If we tried to sum up his message in a phrase, we might perhaps find this in Keats's famous 'Beauty is Truth, Truth Beauty'; only, while Keats was evidently more concerned for Beauty than for Truth, Emerson held an impartial balance. These are with him the tests of each other: whatever is

## *RALPH WALDO EMERSON*

really true is also beautiful, whatever is really beautiful is also true. Hence his especial value to a world whose more refined spirits are continually setting up types of æsthetic beauty which must needs be delusive, as discordant with beauty contemplated under the aspect of morality; while the mass never think of bringing social and political arrangements to the no less infallible test of conformity to an ideally beautiful standard. Hence the seeming idealist is of all men the most practical; and Emerson's gospel of beauty should be especially precious to a country like his own, where circumstances must for so long tell in favor of the more material phases of civilization. Even more important is that aspect of his teaching which deals with the unalterableness of spiritual laws, the impossibility of evading Truth and Fact in the long run, or of wronging any one without at the same time wronging oneself. Happy would it be for the United States if Emerson's essay on 'Compensation' in particular could be impressed upon the conscience, where there is any, of every political leader; and interwoven with the very texture of

## *HISTORIANS AND ESSAYISTS*

the mind of every one who has a vote to cast at the polls!

The special adaptation of Emerson's teaching to the needs of America is, nevertheless, far from the greatest obligation under which he has laid his countrymen. His greatest service is to have embodied a specially American type of thought and feeling. It is the test of real greatness in a nation to be individual, to produce something in the world of intellect peculiar to itself and indefeasibly its own. Such intellectual growths were indeed to be found in America before Emerson's time, but they were not of the highest class. Franklin was a great sage, but his wisdom was worldly wisdom. Emerson gives us, in his own phrase, morality on fire with emotion,—the only morality which in the long run will really influence the heart of man. Man is after all too noble a being to be permanently actuated by enlightened selfishness; and when we compare Emerson with even so truly eminent a character as Franklin, we see, as he saw when he compared Carlyle with Johnson, how great a stride forward his country had taken in the mean

*RALPH WALDO EMERSON*

time. But he could do for America what Carlyle could not do for Great Britain, for it was done already: he could and did create a type of wisdom especially national, as distinctive of the West as Buddha's of the East.

*R. Garnett.*





# **MATTHEW ARNOLD**

**BY**

**GEORGE EDWARD WOODBERRY**



## MATTHEW ARNOLD



**M**ATTHEW ARNOLD, an English poet and critic, was born December 24th, 1822, at Laleham, in the Thames valley. He was the son of Dr. Thomas Arnold, best remembered as the master of Rugby in later years, and distinguished also as an historian of Rome. His mother was, by her maiden name, Mary Penrose, and long survived her husband. Arnold passed his school days at Winchester and Rugby, and went to Oxford in October 1841. There, as also at school, he won scholarship and prize, and showed poetical talent. He was elected a fellow of Oriel in March 1845. He taught for a short time at Rugby, but in 1847 became private secretary to Lord Lansdowne, who in 1851 appointed him school

## *HISTORIANS AND ESSAYISTS*

inspector. From that time he was engaged mainly in educational labors, as inspector and commissioner, and traveled frequently on the Continent examining foreign methods. He was also interested controversially in political and religious questions of the day, and altogether had a sufficient public life outside of literature. In 1851 he married Frances Lucy, daughter of Sir William Wightman, a judge of the Court of Queen's Bench, and by her had five children, three sons and two daughters.

His first volume of verse, 'The Strayed Reveller and Other Poems,' bears the date 1849; the second, 'Empedocles on Etna and Other Poems,' 1852; the third, 'Poems,' made up mainly from the two former, was published in 1853, and thereafter he added little to his poetic work. His first volume of similar significance in prose was 'Essays in Criticism,' issued in 1865. Throughout his mature life he was a constant writer, and his collected works of all kinds now fill eleven volumes, exclusive of his letters. In 1857 he was elected Professor of Poetry at Oxford, and there began his career as a lecturer; and this method of public expression he employed often. His life was

## MATTHEW ARNOLD

thus one with many diverse activities, and filled with practical or literary affairs; and on no side was it deficient in human relations. He won respect and reputation while he lived; and his works continue to attract men's minds, although with much unevenness. He died at Liverpool, on April 15th, 1888.

That considerable portion of Arnold's writings which was concerned with education and politics, or with phases of theological thought and religious tendency, however valuable in contemporary discussion, and to men and movements of the third quarter of the century, must be set on one side. It is not because of anything there contained that he has become a permanent figure of his time, or is of interest in literature. He achieved distinction as a critic and as a poet; but although he was earlier in the field as a poet, he was recognized by the public at large first as a critic. The union of the two functions is not unusual in the history of literature; but where success has been attained in both, the critic has commonly sprung from the poet in the man, and his range and quality have been limited thereby. It was

## *HISTORIANS AND ESSAYISTS*

so with Dryden and Wordsworth, and, less obviously, with Landor and Lowell. In Arnold's case there is no such growth: the two modes of writing, prose and verse, were disconnected. One could read his essays without suspecting a poet, and his poems without discerning a critic, except so far as one finds the moralist there. In fact, Arnold's critical faculty belonged rather to the practical side of his life, and was a part of his talents as a public man.

This appears by the very definitions that he gave, and by the turn of his phrase, which always keeps an audience rather than a meditative reader in view. "What is the function of criticism at the present time?" he asks, and answers—"A disinterested endeavor to learn and propagate the best that is known and thought in the world." That is a wide warrant. The writer who exercises his critical function under it, however, is plainly a reformer at heart, and labors for the social welfare. He is not an analyst of the form of art for its own sake, or a contemplator of its substance of wisdom or beauty merely. He is not limited to literature or the other arts of expression, but the world—the in-

## MATTHEW ARNOLD

tellectual world—is all before him where to choose; and having learned the best that is known and thought, his second and manifestly not inferior duty is to go into all nations, a messenger of the propaganda of intelligence. It is a great mission, and nobly characterized; but if criticism be so defined, it is criticism of a large mold.

The scope of the word conspicuously appears also in the phrase, which became proverbial, declaring that literature is “a criticism of life.” In such an employment of terms, ordinary meanings evaporate; and it becomes necessary to know the thought of the author rather than the usage of men. Without granting the dictum, therefore, which would be far from the purpose, is it not clear that by “critic” and “criticism” Arnold intended to designate, or at least to convey, something peculiar to his own conception,—not strictly related to literature at all, it may be, but more closely tied to society in its general mental activity? In other words, Arnold was a critic of civilization more than of books, and aimed at illumination by means of ideas. With this goes his manner,—that habitual air of telling you something which you did not know before,



## *HISTORIANS AND ESSAYISTS*

and doing it for your good, which stamps him as a preacher born. Under the mask of the critic is the long English face of the gospeler; that type whose persistent physiognomy was never absent from the conventicle of English thought.

This evangelizing prepossession of Arnold's mind must be recognized in order to understand alike his attitude of superiority, his stiffly didactic method, and his success in attracting converts in whom the seed proved barren. The first impression that his entire work makes is one of limitation; so strict is this limitation, and it profits him so much, that it seems the element in which he had his being. On a close survey, the fewness of his ideas is most surprising, though the fact is somewhat cloaked by the lucidity of his thought, its logical vigor, and the manner of its presentation. He takes a text, either some formula of his own or some adopted phrase that he has made his own, and from that he starts out only to return to it again and again with ceaseless iteration. In his illustrations, for example, when he has pilloried some poor gentleman, otherwise unknown, for the astounded and amused contemplation of the

## MATTHEW ARNOLD

Anglican monocle, he cannot let him alone. So too when, with the journalist's knack for nicknames, he divides all England into three parts, he cannot forget the rhetorical exploit. He never lets the points he has made fall into oblivion; and hence his work in general, as a critic, is skeletonized to the memory in watchwords, formulas, and nicknames, which, taken altogether, make up only a small number of ideas.

His scale, likewise, is meagre. His essay is apt to be a book review or a plea merely; it is without that free illusiveness and undeveloped suggestion which indicate a full mind and give to such brief pieces of writing the sense of overflow. He takes no large subject as a whole, but either a small one or else some phases of the larger one; and he exhausts all that he touches. He seems to have no more to say. It is probable that his acquaintance with literature was incommensurate with his reputation or apparent scope as a writer. As he has fewer ideas than any other author of his time of the same rank, so he discloses less knowledge of his own or foreign literatures. His occupations forbade wide acquisition; he husbanded his time, and economized also

## *HISTORIANS AND ESSAYISTS*

by giving the best direction to his private studies, and he accomplished much; but he could not master the field as any man whose profession was literature might easily do. Consequently, in comparison with Coleridge or Lowell, his critical work seems dry and bare, with neither the fluency nor the richness of a master.

In yet another point this paucity of matter appears. What Mr. Richard Holt Hutton says in his essay on the poetry of Arnold is so opposite here that it will be best to quote the passage. He is speaking, in an aside, of Arnold's criticisms:—

"They are fine, they are keen, they are often true; but they are always too much limited to the thin superficial layer of the moral nature of their subjects, and seem to take little comparative interest in the deeper individuality beneath. Read his essay on Heine, and you will see the critic engrossed with the relation of Heine to the political and social ideas of his day, and passing over with comparative indifference the true soul of Heine, the fountain of both his poetry and his cynicism. Read his five lectures on translating Homer, and observe how exclusively the critic's mind is occupied with the form as distinguished from the substance of the Homeric poetry. Even when he concerns himself with the greatest modern poets,—with Shakespeare as in the preface to the earlier edition of his poems, or with Goethe in reiterated poetical criticisms, or when he again and again in his poems treats of Wordsworth,—it is always the style and superficial doctrine of their poetry, not the individual character and

## MATTHEW ARNOLD

unique 'genius, which occupy him. He will tell you whether a poet is 'sane and clear,' or stormy and fervent; whether he is rapid and noble, or loquacious and quaint; whether a thinker penetrates the husks of conventional thought which mislead the crowd; whether there is sweetness as well as lucidity in his aims; whether a descriptive writer has 'distinction' of style, or is admirable only for his vivacity: but he rarely goes to the individual heart of any of the subjects of his criticism; he finds their style and class, but not their personality in that class; he *ranks* his men, but does not portray them; hardly even seems to find much interest in the *individual* roots of their character."

In brief, this is to say that Arnold took little interest in human nature; nor is there anything in his later essays on Byron, Keats, Wordsworth, Milton, or Gray, to cause us to revise the judgment on this point. In fact, so far as he touched on the personality of Keats or Gray, to take the capital instances, he was most unsatisfactory.

Arnold was not, then, one of those critics who are interested in life itself, and through the literary work seize on the soul of the author in its original brightness, or set forth the life-stains in the successive incarnations of his heart and mind. Nor was he of those who consider the work itself final, and endeavor simply to understand it,—form and matter,—and so to mediate between genius and our slower intelligence.

## *HISTORIANS AND ESSAYISTS*

He followed neither the psychological nor the æsthetic method. It need hardly be said that he was born too early to be able ever to conceive of literature as a phenomenon of society, and its great men as only terms in an evolutionary series. He had only a moderate knowledge of literature, and his stock of ideas was small; his manner of speech was hard and dry, there was a trick in his style, and his self-repetition is tiresome.

What gave him vogue, then, and what still keeps his moral literary work alive? Is it anything more than the temper in which he worked, and the spirit which he evoked in the reader? He stood for the very spirit of intelligence in his time. He made his readers respect ideas, and want to have as many as possible. He enveloped them in an atmosphere of mental curiosity and alertness, and put them in contact with novel and attractive themes. In particular, he took their minds to the Continent and made them feel that they were becoming cosmopolitan by knowing Joubert; or at home, he rallied them in opposition to the dullness of the period, to "barbarism" or other objectionable traits in the social

## MATTHEW ARNOLD

classes: and he volleyed contempt upon the common multitudinous foe in general, and from time to time cheered them with some delectable examples of single combat. It cannot be concealed that there was much malicious pleasure in it all. He was not indisposed to high-bred cruelty. Like Lamb, he "loved a fool," but it was in a mortar; and pleasant it was to see the spectacle when he really took a man in hand for the chastisement of irony. It is thus that "*the seraphim illuminati* sneer." And in all his controversial writing there was a brilliancy and unsparingness that will appeal to the deepest instincts of a fighting race, willy-nilly; and as one had only to read the words to feel himself among the children of light, so that our withers were unwrung, there was high enjoyment.

This liveliness of intellectual conflict, together with the sense of ideas, was a boon to youth especially; and the academic air in which the thought and style always moved, with scholarly self-possession and assurance, with the dogmatism of "enlightenment" in all ages and among all sects, with serenity and security unassailable, from within at least—this academic "clearness

## *HISTORIANS AND ESSAYISTS*

and purity without shadow or stain" had an overpowering charm to the college-bred and cultivated, who found the rare combination of information, taste, and aggressiveness in one of their own ilk. Above all, there was the play of intelligence on every page; there was an application of ideas to life in many regions of the world's interests; there was contact with a mind keen, clear, and firm, armed for controversy or persuasion equally, and filled with eager belief in itself, its ways, and its will.

To meet such personality in a book was a bracing experience; and for many these essays were an awakening of the mind itself. We may go to others for the greater part of what criticism can give,—for definite and fundamental principles, for adequate characterization, for the intuition and the revelation, the penetrant flash of thought and phrase: but Arnold generates and supports a temper of mind in which the work of these writers best thrives even in its own sphere; and through him this temper becomes less individual than social, encompassing the whole of life. Few critics have been really less "disinterested," few have kept their eyes less steadily "upon the object": but

## MATTHEW ARNOLD

that fact does not lessen the value of his precepts of disinterestedness and objectivity; nor is it necessary, in becoming "a child of light," to join in spirit the unhappy "remnant" of the academy, or to drink too deep of that honeyed satisfaction, with which he fills his readers, of being on his side. As a critic, Arnold succeeds if his main purpose does not fail, and that was to reinforce the party of ideas, of culture, of the children of light; to impart, not moral vigor, but openness and reasonableness of mind; and to arouse and arm the intellectual in contradiction to the other energies of civilization.

The poetry of Arnold, to pass to the second portion of his work, was less widely welcomed than his prose, and made its way very slowly; but it now seems the most important and permanent part. It is not small in quantity, though his unproductiveness in later years has made it appear that he was less fluent and abundant in verse than he really was. The remarkable thing, as one turns to his poems, is the contrast in spirit that they afford to the essays: there is here an atmosphere of entire calm. We seem to be in a different world. This fact, with the



## *HISTORIANS AND ESSAYISTS*

singular silence of his familiar letters in regard to his verse, indicates that his poetic life was truly a thing apart.

In one respect only is there something in common between his prose and verse: just as interest in human nature was absent in the latter, it is absent also in the former. There is no action in the poems; neither is there character for its own sake. Arnold was a man of the mind, and he betrays no interest in personality except for its intellectual traits; in Clough as in Obermann, it is the life of thought, not the human being, that he portrays. As a poet, he expresses the moods of the meditative spirit in view of nature and our moral existence; and he represents life, not lyrically by its changeful moments, nor tragically by its conflict in great characters, but philosophically by a self-contained and unvarying monologue, deeper or less deep in feeling and with cadences of tone, but always with the same grave and serious effect. He is constantly thinking, whatever his subject or his mood; his attitude is intellectual, his sentiments are maxims, his conclusions are advisory. His world is the sphere of thought, and his poems have the distance

## MATTHEW ARNOLD

and repose and also the coldness that befit that sphere; and the character of his imagination, which lays hold of form and reason, makes natural to him the classical style.

It is obvious that the sources of his poetical culture are Greek. It is not merely, however, that he takes for his early subjects Merope and Empedocles, or that he strives in 'Balder Dead' for Homeric narrative, or that in the recitative to which he was addicted he evoked an immelodious phantom of Greek choruses; nor is it the "marmoreal air" that chills while it ennobles much of his finest work. One feels the Greek quality not as a source but as a presence. In Tennyson, Keats, and Shelley, there was Greek influence, but in them the result was modern. In Arnold the antiquity remains; remains in mood, just as in Landor it remains in form. The Greek twilight broods over all his poetry. It is pagan in philosophic spirit; not Attic, but of a later and stoical time, with the very virtues of patience, endurance, suffering, not in their Christian types, but as they now seem to a post-Christian imagination looking back to the imperial past. There

## *HISTORIANS AND ESSAYISTS*

is a difference, it is true, in Arnold's expression of the mood: he is as little Sophoclean as he is Homeric, as little Lucretian as he is Vergilian. The temperament is not the same, not a survival or a revival of the antique, but original and living. And yet the mood of the verse is felt at once to be a reincarnation of the deathless spirit of Hellas, that in other ages also has made beautiful and solemn for a time the shadowed places of the Christian world. If one does not realize this, he must miss the secret of the tranquillity, the chill, the grave austerity, as well as the philosophical resignation, which are essential to the verse. Even in those parts of the poems which use romantic motives, one reason of their original charm is that they suggest how the Greek imagination would have dealt with the forsaken merman, the church of Brou, and Tristram and Iseult. The presence of such motives, such mythology, and such Christian and chivalric color in the work of Arnold does not disturb the simple unity of its feeling, which finds no solvent for life, whatever its accident of time and place and faith, except in that Greek spirit which ruled in thoughtful men before the

## MATTHEW ARNOLD

triumph of Christianity, and is still native in men who accept the intellect as the sole guide of life.

It was with reference to these modern men and the movement they took part in, that he made his serious claim to greatness; to rank, that is, with Tennyson and Browning, as he said, in the literature of his time. "My poems," he wrote, "represent on the whole the main movement of mind of the last quarter of a century; and thus they will probably have their day as people become conscious to themselves of what that movement of mind is, and interested in the literary productions that reflect it. It might be fairly urged that I have less poetical sentiment than Tennyson, and less intellectual vigor and abundance than Browning; yet because I have, perhaps, more of a fusion of the two than either of them, and have more regularly applied that fusion to the main line of modern development, I am likely enough to have my turn, as they have had theirs." If the main movement had been such as he thought of it, or if it had been of importance in the long run, there might be a sounder basis for this hope than now appears to be the case;

## *HISTORIANS AND ESSAYISTS*

but there can be no doubt, let the contemporary movement have been what it may, that Arnold's mood is one that will not pass out of men's hearts to-day nor to-morrow.

On the modern side the example of Wordsworth was most formative, and in fact it is common to describe Arnold as a Wordsworthian: and so, in his contemplative attitude to nature, and in his habitual recourse to her, he was; but both nature herself as she appeared to him, and his mood in her presence, were very different from Wordsworth's conception and emotion. Arnold finds in nature a refuge from life, an anodyne, an escape; but Wordsworth, in going into the hills for poetical communion, passed from a less to a fuller and deeper life, and obtained an inspiration, and was seeking the goal of all his being. In the method of approach, too, as well as in the character of the experience, there was a profound difference between the two poets. Arnold sees with the outward rather than the inward eye. He is pictorial in a way that Wordsworth seldom is; he uses detail much more, and gives a group or a scene with the externality of a painter. The

## MATTHEW ARNOLD

method resembles that of Tennyson rather than that of Wordsworth, and has more direct analogy with the Greek manner than with the modern and emotional schools; it is objective, often minute, and always carefully composed, in the artistic sense of that term. The description of the river Oxus, for example, though faintly charged with suggested and allegoric meaning, is a noble close to the poem which ends in it. The scale is large, and Arnold was fond of a broad landscape, of mountains, and prospects over the land; but one cannot fancy Wordsworth writing it. So too, on a small scale, the charming scene of the English garden in 'Thyrsis' is far from Wordsworth's manner:—

“When garden walks and all the grassy floor  
With blossoms red and white of fallen May  
And chestnut-flowers are strewn—  
So have I heard the cuckoo's parting cry,  
From the wet field, through the vext garden trees,  
Come with the volleying rain and tossing breeze.”

This is a picture that could be framed: how different from Wordsworth's “wandering voice”! Or to take another notable example, which, like the Oxus passage, is a fine close in the ‘Tristram and Iseult,’—

## *HISTORIANS AND ESSAYISTS*

the hunter on the arras above the dead lovers:—

“A stately huntsman, clad in green,  
And round him a fresh forest scene.  
On that clear forest-knoll he stays,  
With his pack round him, and delays.

\* \* \* \* \*

The wild boar rustles in his lair,  
The fierce hounds snuff the tainted air,  
But lord and hounds keep rooted there.  
Cheer, cheer thy dogs into the brake,  
O hunter! and without a fear  
Thy golden tasseled bugle blow—”

But no one is deceived, and the hunter does not move from the arras, but is still “rooted there,” with his green suit and his golden tassel. The piece is pictorial, and highly wrought for pictorial effects only, obviously decorative and used as stage scenery precisely in the manner of our later theatrical art, with that accent of forethought which turns the beautiful into the æsthetic. This is a method which Wordsworth never used. Take one of his pictures, the ‘Reaper’ for example, and see the difference. The one is out-of-doors, the other is of the studio. The purpose of these illustrations is to show that Arnold’s nature-pictures are not only consciously artistic, with an arrangement that approaches artifice, but

## MATTHEW ARNOLD

that he is interested through his eye primarily and not through his emotions. It is characteristic of his temperament also that he reminds one most often of the painter in water-colors.

If there is this difference between Arnold and Wordsworth in method, a greater difference in spirit is to be anticipated. It is a fixed gulf. In nature Wordsworth found the one spirit's "plastic stress," and a near and intimate revelation to the soul of truths that were his greatest joy and support in existence. Arnold finds there no inhabitaney of God, no such streaming forth of wisdom and beauty from the fountain heads of being; but the secret frame of nature is filled only with the darkness, the melancholy, the waiting endurance that is projected from himself:—

" Yet, Fausta, the mute turf we tread,  
The solemn hills about us spread,  
The stream that falls incessantly,  
The strange-scrawled rocks, the lonely sky,  
If I might lend their life a voice,  
Seem to bear rather than rejoice."

Compare this with Wordsworth's 'Stanzas on Peele Castle,' and the important reservations that must be borne in mind in describing Arnold as a Wordsworthian will be-



## *HISTORIANS AND ESSAYISTS*

come clearer. It is as a relief from thought, as a beautiful and half-physical diversion, as a scale of being so vast and mysterious as to reduce the pettiness of human life to nothingness,—it is in these ways that nature has value in Arnold's verse. Such a poet may describe natural scenes well, and obtain by means of them contrast to human conditions, and decorative beauty; but he does not penetrate nature or interpret what her significance is in the human spirit, as the more emotional poets have done. He ends in an antithesis, not in a synthesis, and both nature and man lose by the divorce. One looks in vain for anything deeper than landscapes in Arnold's treatment of nature; she is emptied of her own infinite, and has become spiritually void: and in the simple great line in which he gave the sea—

“The unplumbed, salt, estranging sea—”

he is thinking of man, not of the ocean: and the mood seems ancient rather than modern, the feeling of a Greek, just as the sound of the waves to him is always *Ægean*.

In treating of man's life, which must be the main thing in any poet's work, Arnold

## MATTHEW ARNOLD

is either very austere or very pessimistic. If the feeling is moral, the predominant impression is of austerity; if it is intellectual, the predominant impression is of sadness; he was not insensible to the charm of life, but he feels it in his senses only to deny it in his mind. The illustrative passage is from 'Dover Beach':—

"Ah, love, let us be true  
To one another! for the world which seems  
To lie before us like a land of dreams,  
So various, so beautiful, so new,  
Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,  
Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain."

This is the contradiction of sense and thought, the voice of a regret grounded in the intellect (for if it were vital and grounded in the emotions, it would become despair); the creed of illusion and futility in life, which is the characteristic note of Arnold, and the reason of his acceptance by many minds. The one thing about life which he most insists on is its isolation, its individuality. In the series called 'Switzerland,' this is the substance of the whole; and the doctrine is stated with an intensity and power, with an amplitude and prolongation, that set these poems apart as the most remarkable of all his lyrics. From a poet so

## *HISTORIANS AND ESSAYISTS*

deeply impressed with this aspect of existence, and unable to find its remedy or its counterpart in the harmony of life, no joyful or hopeful word can be expected, and none is found. The second thing about life which he dwells on is its futility; though he bids one strive and work, and points to the example of the strong whom he has known, yet one feels that his voice rings more true when he writes of Obermann than in any other of the elegiac poems. In such verse as the 'Summer Night,' again, the genuineness of the mood is indubitable. In 'The Sick King of Bokhara,' the one dramatic expression of his genius, futility is the very centre of the action. The fact that so much of his poetry seems to take its motive from the subsidence of Christian faith has set him among the skeptic or agnostic poets, and the "main movement" which he believed he had expressed was doubtless that in which agnosticism was a leading element. The unbelief of the third quarter of the century was certainly a controlling influence over him, and in a man mainly intellectual by nature it could not well have been otherwise.

Hence, as one looks at his more philosophical and lyrical poems—the profounder part

## MATTHEW ARNOLD

of his work—and endeavors to determine their character and sources alike, it is plain to see that in the old phrase, "the pride of the intellect" lifts its lonely column over the desolation of every page. The man of the academy is here, as in the prose, after all. He reveals himself in the literary motive, the bookish atmosphere of the verse, in its vocabulary, its elegance of structure, its precise phrase and its curious allusions (involving foot-notes), and in fact, throughout all its form and structure. So self-conscious is it that it becomes frankly prosaic at inconvenient times, and is more often on the level of eloquent and graceful rhetoric than of poetry. It is frequently liquid and melodious, but there is no burst of native song in it anywhere. It is the work of a true poet, nevertheless; but there are many voices for the Muse. It is sincere, it is touched with reality; it is the mirror of a phase of life in our times, and not in our times only, but whenever the intellect seeks expression for its sense of the limitation of its own career, and its sadness in a world which it cannot solve.

A word should be added concerning the personality of Arnold which is revealed in

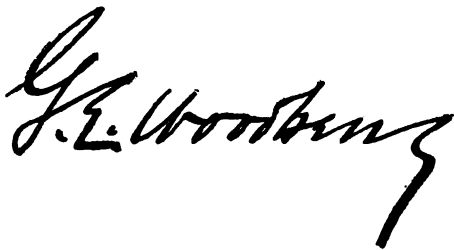
## *HISTORIANS AND ESSAYISTS*

his familiar letters,—a collection that has dignified the records of literature with a singularly noble memory of private life. Few who did not know Arnold could have been prepared for the revelation of a nature so true, so amiable, so dutiful. In every relation of private life he is shown to have been a man of exceptional constancy and plainness. The letters are mainly home letters; but a few friendships also yielded up their hoard, and thus the circle of private life is made complete. Every one must take delight in the mental association with Arnold in the scenes of his existence, thus daily exposed, and in his family affections. A nature warm to its own, kindly to all, cheerful, fond of sport and fun, and always fed from pure fountains, and with it a character so founded upon the rock, so humbly serviceable, so continuing in power and grace, must wake in all the responses of happy appreciation, and leave the charm of memory.

He did his duty as naturally as if it required neither resolve, nor effort, nor thought of any kind for the morrow, and he never failed, seemingly, in act or word of sympathy, in little or great things; and

*MATTHEW ARNOLD*

when, to this, one adds the clear ether of the intellectual life where he habitually moved in his own life apart, and the humanity of his home, the gift that these letters bring may be appreciated. That gift is the man himself; but set in the atmosphere of home, with sonship and fatherhood, sisters and brothers, with the bereavements of years fully accomplished, and those of babyhood and boyhood,—a sweet and wholesome English home, with all the cloud and sunshine of the English world drifting over its roof-tree, and the soil of England beneath its stones, and English duties for the breath of its being. To add such a home to the household-rights of English literature is perhaps something from which Arnold would have shrunk, but it endears his memory.

A large, stylized handwritten signature in black ink, reading "G. E. Woodbury". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping tail on the final letter.



**THOMAS BABINGTON MACAULAY**

**(1800-1859)**

**BY**

**JOHN BACH McMASTER**





## THOMAS BABINGTON MACAULAY



**T**HOMAS BABINGTON MACAULAY, the most widely read of English essayists and historians, was born near London on the 25th of October, 1800. His early education was received at private schools; but in 1818 he went into residence at Trinity College, Cambridge, graduated with honor, and was elected a fellow in 1824. Out of deference to the wishes of his father he thought for a while of becoming an attorney, read law, and was called to the bar in 1826. But the labors of the profession were little to his liking; no business of consequence came to him, and he was soon deep in literature and politics, for the pursuit of which his tastes, his habits, and his parts pre-eminently fitted him.

His nephew and biographer has gathered

## *HISTORIANS AND ESSAYISTS*

a mass of anecdotes and reminiscences which go far to show that while still a lad Macaulay displayed in a high degree many of the mental characteristics which later in life made him famous. The eagerness with which he devoured books of every sort; the marvelous memory which enabled him to recall for years whole pages and poems, read but once; the quickness of perception by the aid of which he could at a glance extract the contents of a printed page; his love of novels and poetry, his volubility, his positiveness of assertion, and the astonishing amount of information he could pour out on matters of even trivial importance,—were as characteristic of the boy as of the man.

As might have been expected from one so gifted, Macaulay began to write while a mere child, but his first printed piece was an anonymous letter defending novel-reading and lauding Fielding and Smollett. It was written at the age of sixteen; was addressed to his father, then editor of the *Christian Observer*, was inserted in utter ignorance of the author, and brought down on the periodical the wrath of a host of subscribers. One declared that he had given the obnoxious number to the flames, and should never again

## *THOMAS BABINGTON MACAULAY*

read the magazine. At twenty-three Macaulay began to write for Knight's Quarterly Magazine, and contributed to it articles some of which—as 'The Conversation between Mr. Abraham Cowley and Mr. John Milton touching the Great Civil War'; his criticism of Dante and Petrarch; that on Athenian Orators; and the 'Fragments of a Roman Tale'—are still given a place in his collected writings. In themselves these pieces are of small value; but they served to draw attention to the author just at the time when Jeffrey, the editor of the great Whig Edinburgh Review, was eagerly and anxiously searching for "some clever young man" to write for it. Macaulay was such a clever young man. Overtures were therefore made to him; and in 1825, in the August number of the Review, appeared his essay on John Milton. The effect was immediate. Like Byron, he awoke one morning to find himself famous; was praised and complimented on every hand, and day after day saw his table covered with cards of invitation to dinner from every part of London. And well he might be praised; for no English magazine had ever before published so readable, so eloquent, so entertaining an essay. Its very faults are pleasing.

## *HISTORIANS AND ESSAYISTS*

Its merits are of a high order; but the passage which will best bear selection as a specimen of the writing of Macaulay at twenty-five is the description of the Puritan.

Macaulay had now found his true vocation, and entered on it eagerly and with delight. In March, 1827, came the essay on Machiavelli; and during 1828 those on John Dryden, on History, and on Hallam's 'Constitutional History.' During 1829 he wrote and published reviews of James Mill's 'Essay on Government' (which involved him in an unseemly wrangle with the Westminster Review, and called forth two more essays on the Utilitarian Theory of Government), Southey's 'Colloquies on Society,' Sadler's 'Law of Population,' and the reviews of Robert Montgomery's Poems. The reviews of Moore's 'Life of Byron' and of Southey's edition of the 'Pilgrim's Progress' appeared during 1830. In that same year Macaulay entered Parliament, and for a time the essays came forth less frequently. A reply to a pamphlet by Mr. Sadler written in reply to Macaulay's review, the famous article in which Croker's edition of Boswell's Johnson was pilloried, and the essay on John Hampden, were all he wrote in 1831. In 1832 came

## *THOMAS BABINGTON MACAULAY*

Burleigh and his Times, and Mirabeau; in 1833 The War of the Succession in Spain, and Horace Walpole; in 1834 William Pitt, Earl of Chatham; in 1835 Sir James Mackintosh; in 1837 Lord Bacon, the finest yet produced; in 1838 Sir William Temple; in 1839 Gladstone on Church and State; and in 1840 the greatest of all his essays, those on Von Ranke's 'History of the Popes' and on Lord Clive. The Comic Dramatists of the Restoration, Warren Hastings, and a short sketch of Lord Holland were written in 1841; Frederic the Great in 1842; Madame D'Arblay and Addison in 1843; Barère and The Earl of Chatham in 1844: and with these the long list closes.

Never before in any period of twenty years had the British reading public been instructed and amused by so splendid a series of essays. Taken as a whole the series falls naturally into three classes: the critical, the biographical, and the historical. Each has merits and peculiarities of its own; but all have certain characteristics in common which enable us to treat them in a group.

Whoever will take the pains to read the six-and-thirty essays we have mentioned,—and he will be richly repaid for his pains,—

## *HISTORIANS AND ESSAYISTS*

cannot fail to perceive that sympathy with the past is Macaulay's ruling passion. Concerning the present he knew little and cared less. The range of topics covered by him was enormous; art, science, theology, history, literature, poetry, the drama, philosophy—all were passed in review. Yet he has never once failed to treat his subject historically. We look in vain for the faintest approach to a philosophical or analytical treatment. He reviewed Mill's essay on Government, and Hallam's 'Constitutional History'; but he made no observations on government in the abstract, nor expressed any opinions as to what sort of government is best suited for civilized communities in general. He wrote about Bacon; yet he never attempted to expound the principles or describe the influence of the Baconian philosophy. He wrote about Addison and Johnson, Hastings and Clive, Machiavelli and Horace Walpole and Madame D'Arblay; yet in no case did he analyze the works, or fully examine the characteristics, or set forth exhaustively the ideas, of one of them. They are to him mere pegs on which to hang a splendid historical picture of the times in which these people lived. Thus the essay

## *THOMAS BABINGTON MACAULAY*

on Milton is a review of the Cromwellian period; Machiavelli, of Italian morals in the sixteenth century; that on Dryden, of the state of poetry and the drama in the days of Charles the Second; that on Johnson, of the state of English literature in the days of Walpole. In the essays on Clive and Hastings we find little of the founders of British India beyond the enumeration of their acts. But the Mogul empire, and the rivalries and struggles which overthrew it, are all depicted in gorgeous detail. No other writer has ever given so fine an account of the foreign policy of Charles the Second as Macaulay has done in the essay on Sir William Temple; nor of the Parliamentary history of England for the forty years preceding our Revolution as is to be found in the essays on Lord Chatham. In each case the image of the man whose name stands at the head of the essay is blurred and indistinct. We are told of the trial of John Hampden; but we do not see the fearless champion of popular liberty as he stood before the judges of King Charles. We are introduced to Frederic the Great, and are given a summary of his characteristics and a glowing narrative of the wars in which he won fame; but the real



## *HISTORIANS AND ESSAYISTS*

Frederic, the man contending "against the greatest superiority of power and the utmost spite of fortune," is lost in the mass of accessories. He describes the outward man admirably: the inner man is never touched.

But however faulty the Essays may be in respect to the treatment accorded to individual men, they display a prodigious knowledge of the facts and events of the periods they cover. His wonderful memory, stored with information gathered from a thousand sources, his astonishing power of arranging facts and bringing them to bear on any subject, whether it called for description or illustration, joined with a clear and vigorous style, enabled him to produce historical scenes with a grouping, a finish, and a splendor to which no other writer can approach. His picture of the Puritan in the essay on Milton, and of Loyola and the Jesuits in the essay on the Popes; his description of the trial of Warren Hastings; of the power and magnificence of Spain under Philip the Second; of the destiny of the Church of Rome; of the character of Charles the Second in the essay on Sir James Mackintosh,—are but a few of many of his bits of word-painting which cannot be surpassed. What is thus

## **THOMAS BABINGTON MACAULAY**

true of particular scenes and incidents in the Essays is equally true of many of them in the whole. Long periods of time, great political movements, complicated policies, fluctuations of ministries, are sketched with an accuracy, animation, and clearness not to be met with in any elaborate treatise covering the same period.

While Macaulay was writing two and three essays a year, he won renown in a new field by the publication of 'The Lays of Ancient Rome.' They consist of four ballads—'Horatius'; 'The Battle of the Lake Regillus'; 'Virginius'; and 'The Prophecy of Capys'—which are supposed to have been sung by Roman minstrels, and to belong to a very early period in the history of the city. In them are repeated all the merits and all the defects of the Essays. The men and women are mere enumerations of qualities; the battle pieces are masses of uncombined incidents: but the characteristics of the periods treated have been caught and reproduced with perfect accuracy. The setting of Horatius, which belongs to the earliest days of Rome, is totally different from the setting of the Prophecy of Capys, which belongs to the time when Rome was fast acquiring the mas-

## *HISTORIANS AND ESSAYISTS*

tery over Italy; and in each case the setting is studiously and remarkably exact. In these poems, again, there is the same prodigious learning, the same richness of illustration, which distinguish the essays; and they are adorned with a profusion of metaphor and aptness of epithets which is most admirable.

The 'Lays' appeared in 1842, and at once found their way into popular favor. Macaulay's biographer assures us that in ten years 18,000 copies were sold in Great Britain; 40,000 copies in twenty years; and before 1875 nearly 100,000 had passed into the hands of readers.

Meantime the same popularity attended the 'Essays.' Again and again Macaulay had been urged to collect and publish them in book form, and had stoutly refused. But when an enterprising publisher in Philadelphia not only reprinted them but shipped copies to England, Macaulay gave way; and in the early months of 1843 a volume was issued. Like the Lays, the Essays rose at once into popular favor, and in the course of thirty years 120,000 copies were sold in the United Kingdom by one publisher.

But the work on which he was now intent was the 'History of England from the acces-

## **THOMAS BABINGTON MACAULAY**

sion of King James the Second down to a time which is within the memory of men still living." The idea of such a narrative had long been in his mind, but it was not till 1841 that he began seriously to write, and not till 1848 that he published the first and second volumes. Again his success was instant. Nothing like it had been known since the days of Waverley. Of 'Marmion' 2,000 were sold in the first month; of Macaulay's History 3,000 copies were sold in ten days. Of the 'Lay of the Last Minstrel' 2,250 copies were disposed of in course of the first year; but the publishers sold 13,000 copies of Macaulay in four months. In the United States the success was greater yet.

"We beg you to accept herewith a copy of our cheap edition of your work," wrote Harper & Brothers in 1849. "There have been three other editions published by different houses, and another is now in preparation; so there will be six different editions in the market. We have already sold 40,000 copies, and we presume that over 60,000 copies have been disposed of. Probably within three months of this time the sale will amount to 200,000 copies. No work of any kind has ever so completely taken our whole country by storm."

Astonishing as was the success, it never flagged; and year after year the London publisher disposed of the work at the rate of seventy sets a week. In November, 1855,

## *HISTORIANS AND ESSAYISTS*

the third and fourth volumes were issued. Confident of an immense sale, 25,000 copies were printed as a first edition, and were taken by the trade before a copy was bound. In the United States the sale, he was assured by Everett, was greater than that of any book ever printed, save the Bible and a few school books in universal use. Prior to 1875, his biographer states, 140,000 copies of the *History* were sold in the United Kingdom. In ten weeks from the day of the issue 26,500 copies were taken, and in March, 1856, \$100,000 was paid him as a part of the royalty due in December.

Honors of every sort were now showered on him. He was raised to the peerage; he was rich, famous, and great. But the enjoyment of his honors was short-lived; for in December, 1859, he was found in his library, seated in his easy-chair, dead. Before him on the table lay a copy of the *Cornhill Magazine*, open at the first page of Thackeray's story of 'Lovel the Widower.'

All that has been said regarding the *Essays* and the *Lays* applies with equal force to the '*History of England*.' No historian who has yet written has shown such familiarity with the facts of English history, no

*THOMAS BABINGTON MACAULAY*

matter what the subject in hand may be: the extinction of villeinage, the Bloody Assizes, the appearance of the newspaper, the origin of the national debt, or the state of England in 1685. Macaulay is absolutely unrivaled in the art of arranging and combining his facts, and of presenting in a clear and vigorous narrative the spirit of the epoch he treats. Nor should we fail to mention that both Essays and History abound in remarks, general observations, and comment always clear, vigorous, and shrewd, and in the main very just.

*John Back Munster*



**WASHINGTON IRVING**

**(1783-1859)**

**BY**

**EDWIN W. MORSE**





## WASHINGTON IRVING



**T**O WASHINGTON IRVING belongs the title of the Founder of American Literature. Born while the British troops were still in possession of his native city, New York, and overtaken by death a year before Abraham Lincoln was elected President of the United States, he represents a span of life from Revolutionary days to a period well remembered by men now of middle age. Before his day American literature was theological and political,—the outgrowth of the great questions of Church and State which the settlement of the colonies and the rupture with the mother country gave rise to. The only considerable venture in *belles-lettres* had been made by Charles Brockden Brown, whose romances published in the turn of the

## *HISTORIANS AND ESSAYISTS*

century were highly praised in their day, but are now unread.

Irving loved literature for its own sake, and not as a means to the attainment of some social, moral, or political end; and this trait differentiates him sharply from his predecessors. When he began to write, the field of letters was unoccupied. His first book had been published eight years when Bryant's 'Thanatopsis' appeared in the *North American Review*; and it was three years later before Cooper's first novel, 'Precaution,' was published. His position in American literature is thus unique, and will always remain so.

The qualities which were most characteristic of his work were sentiment and humor; and these acquired a high literary value through the graceful, varied, and finished form in which they were cast. The source of the keen literary sense that revealed itself in him in early life, and that was highly developed even before he attained his majority, is not easily traced. It was, however, a powerful impulse, and persisted in shaping his character and in controlling his destiny, despite his half-hearted efforts to acquire a taste for the law, and later for commercial pursuits. To its influence, moreover, is at-

## WASHINGTON IRVING

tributable his aloofness from the political and other public life of his time, which seems somewhat singular in a man of his imaginative, emotional temperament, when one remembers the stormy period in which his youth and early manhood were passed. When he was beguiled against his inclination to take some part in local politics, he spent the first day, true to his real nature, in hunting for "whim, character, and absurdity" in the crowd in which he found himself. From this early time onward, whatever was eccentric or strongly individual in human nature had a remarkable fascination for his alert, observing mind. Apparently, however, the politics of the day did not yield the material that he sought, nor were the associations of political life agreeable to one of his fastidious tastes. For after a brief experience he writes: "Truly this saving one's country is a nauseous piece of business; and if patriotism is such a dirty virtue—prythee, no more of it." This sentiment had its spring in no lack of loyalty to his country, but rather in his physical repugnance to the unwashed political "workers" of his day and to familiar intercourse with them.

Irving's detachment from the public affairs

## *HISTORIANS AND ESSAYISTS*

of his time was further illustrated in a somewhat amusing manner during his first visit to Europe. When he reached France, Napoleon's conquest of Italy and his assumption of the title of Emperor were on every tongue. Contemporary greatness, however, which subsequent events were to bring to a much more striking perspective than was within the scope of his vision at this time, had no attraction for the young American traveler. His sole anxiety was to see, not Napoleon, but the tomb of Laura at Avignon; and great was his disappointment to find that the monument had been destroyed in the Revolution. "Never," he breaks out, "did the Revolution and its authors and its consequences receive a more hearty and sincere execration than at that moment. Throughout the whole of my journey I had found reason to exclaim against it, for depriving me of some valuable curiosity or celebrated monument; but this was the severest disappointment it had yet occasioned." This purely literary view of the greatest event of modern times is significant of Irving's attitude of mind toward the political and social forces which were changing the boundaries of kingdoms and revolutionizing society. He had reached his majority;

## WASHINGTON IRVING

but the literary associations of the Old World were of infinitely more moment to him than the overthrow of kings and the warrings of nations.

A partial, but only a partial, explanation of this literary sense which young Irving possessed can be found in his ancestry. It did not, one may be sure, come from the side of his father, who was a worthy Scotchman of good family, a native of one of the Orkney Islands. William Irving had passed his life on or near the sea, and was a petty officer on an armed packet when he met in Falmouth the girl who was to become his wife and the author's mother. Mrs. Irving was a woman of much beauty and of a lovely disposition, and she exerted a great influence upon the character of the son. The desire to wander far afield, which pursued Irving through a large part of his life, may also be traced, it seems to me, to the parent stock, which must have been saturated with the adventurous spirit of a seafaring life. This impulse made itself felt when Irving was very young; for in the account which the author of the 'Sketch Book' gives of himself he admits that he "began his travels when a mere child, and made many tours of discovery into foreign

## *HISTORIANS AND ESSAYISTS*

parts and unknown regions of his native city, to the frequent alarm of his parents and the emolument of the town crier." As Irving was born on April 3d, 1783, his parents having been residents of New York for about twenty years, we may believe that these youthful escapades took place when the boy was perhaps six or eight years old; say a year or two after Washington began his first term as President. The lad possessed from an early age, in addition to this roving tendency, a romantic, emotional, imaginative temperament, which invested with a special interest for him every spot in or near his native town that had become celebrated through fable or by a tragedy in real life.

The New York through which the lad, brimful of gay spirits and of boundless curiosity, wandered was a town devoted exclusively to commerce, of fewer than twenty-five thousand inhabitants. It was confined within narrow limits. An excursion from the Irving home in William Street, about half-way between Fulton and John Streets, to what is now Chambers Street must have brought the venturesome youth into the fields and among country houses. The educational facilities of the town were meager, and young

## WASHINGTON IRVING

Irving had little taste for study. Rather than go to school, he preferred to loiter around the wharves and dream of the far-distant lands whence the ships with their odorous cargoes had come; while in the evening he would steal away to the theater in company with a companion of about his own age, James K. Paulding, with whom some years later he was to make his first literary venture. He liked to read books of voyages and romances, like 'Robinson Crusoe' and 'Sindbad,' much better than the 'Pilgrim's Progress,' which his father, then a deacon in the Presbyterian Church, gave him for his Sunday perusal. Two of his brothers—he was the youngest of a family of eight boys—had been sent to Columbia College, but Washington was not a student. Text-books were repugnant to him; and lacking the faculty of application and concentration, he never made much headway with routine studies, although he acquired a little knowledge of Latin in addition to the ordinary branches of learning. He was "a saunterer and a dreamer," did not like to study, and had no ambition to go to college.

As the years were slipping by, and as it was plainly necessary for him to prepare him-



## *HISTORIANS AND ESSAYISTS*

self for some work in life, young Irving entered a law office. But the dry routine of reading law proved to be very distasteful to him, and he soon drifted into general literature, in the reading of which he atoned in large part for the deficiencies of his early schooling. His indolence was partly due to temperament, and partly no doubt to physical causes. For his health was not robust. A weakness of the lungs showed itself, and gave him a good excuse to get away from books and into the open air, and to indulge his liking for travel and exploration. He had already wandered, gun in hand, along the shores of the Hudson and through the woods of Westchester County, becoming well acquainted with the natural beauties of the Sleepy Hollow country, which he was later to people with legendary figures. He had also made a voyage up the Hudson, and had journeyed through the valley of the Mohawk. The pulmonary trouble which made it necessary for him to take a more extended outing made itself felt while he was dawdling over his law-books in the office of Josiah Ogden Hoffman; and in the next two years—this was between 1802 and 1804—he made several adventurous journeys to

## WASHINGTON IRVING

the north, going so far on one occasion as Montreal.

It was during this period of Irving's life, when he was approaching his majority, that another important aspect of his character—the social, which was to influence his entire career and to leave its color indelibly stamped upon his writings—made itself apparent. From an early age the social instinct was strong in him. As he grew older he developed "a boundless capacity for good-fellowship," as one of his contemporaries testifies. This liking for his fellow-man had for its foundation a warm-hearted, sympathetic, generous nature, a rich vein of humor, perfect ease of manner and great readiness as a talker, and an optimistic philosophy of life. These amiable traits made him many friends in the towns which he visited outside of New York in this period of his life, and throw a flood of light upon the warm friendships which he made in England and elsewhere in later years. It is easy to believe that these qualities of mind and heart were due in large part to the influence of his mother, the gentleness and sweetness of whose nature must have had a deep effect upon the impressionable son. And to the same tender influence

## *HISTORIANS AND ESSAYISTS*

is probably due the devotion, almost idolatrous, which Irving showed both in his writings and in his social relations throughout his life to womankind. By temperament extremely susceptible to the attractions of the sex, he was always their ardent admirer and chivalric defender. The untimely death of the girl whom we may well believe to have been the embodiment of his loftiest ideals, the second daughter of the Mr. Hoffman under whom he had read law, imparted a tinge of melancholy to his emotional temperament, and remained with him as a sad memory throughout his life. This overwhelming disappointment, and the necessity which arose some years later that he should assume the responsibility of supporting his brothers, made marriage an impossibility for him.

This tragedy, however, had not overshadowed his life when, in 1804, Irving made his first journey to Europe, in search of the health which he had not been able to find in northern New York and in Canada. He had just passed his twenty-first birthday; and despite his poor health, he was all eagerness to see the famous places which his reading had made familiar to his lively imagination. The reality exceeded his anticipations. His

## WASHINGTON IRVING

health was restored by the voyage, and he gave himself up to sight-seeing and to making friends. He loitered here and there: in Italy, where he met Allston, who nearly persuaded him to become a painter; in Paris, where he frequented the theaters; and in London, where he saw John Kemble and Mrs. Siddons. He studied little, but observed much, gathering materials perhaps subconsciously from the associations historic and legendary connected with this old and infinitely rich civilization, to be worked later into delightful stories and sketches. He was forming his taste, too, on the best models, and was thus laying a broad foundation for his literary career, although he had as yet written nothing.

After two enjoyable years abroad, Irving returned in 1806 to New York, and soon began to feel his way into the world of letters through the pages of *Salmagundi*, a periodical which he wrote in conjunction with the friend of his youth, James K. Paulding. These papers on society and its "whim-whams," or fads as we should say, have only a slight interest to-day as a reflection of the manners of the time; but to Irving's contemporaries the vivacity and spirit with which

## *HISTORIANS AND ESSAYISTS*

they were written, and the thread of humor which ran through them, were sources of much entertainment and amusement. With the Knickerbocker 'History of New York,' however,—which was published in 1809, the year in which Madison succeeded Jefferson to the Presidency, —Irving acquired widespread celebrity. This book was the first real piece of literature which America had produced, and it served to introduce its author into a still wider and more influential circle of friends in the literary and art world when he made his second visit to England in 1815. His constitutional indolence, his distrust of his capacity, and the distractions of society interfered to prevent him, after his first success, from accepting literature as his vocation. Finally, he entered into the business which his brothers had been carrying on with indifferent results, although his distaste for commercial affairs was unconcealed. At last the necessity arose that he should go to England, in order if possible to place the affairs of the firm—the Irvings were importers of hardware—on a sounder basis. The fortunate—no other word in view of the event seems so appropriate—failure of the firm, a few years after his arrival in Eng-

## WASHINGTON IRVING

land, compelled him to cast about in search of some means of repairing the broken fortunes of the family; and he naturally turned again to letters.

This decision was the turning-point in Irving's career. He forthwith began the preparation of the several numbers of the 'Sketch Book'; the popularity of which, when they were published in 1819 and 1820, decided him to make literature his life-work. The financial returns from these ventures were more than he had dreamed of, and, with the offers which poured in upon him from English publishers, gave him a feeling of independence and security for the future. From this time on he produced books with rapidity. 'Bracebridge Hall' and the 'Tales of a Traveller' appeared in 1822 and in 1824 respectively. A residence of several years in Spain resulted in the production of the 'Life of Columbus' (1828), the 'Conquest of Granada' (1829), and the 'Alhambra' tales and sketches. On his return to the United States in 1832, after an absence of seventeen years, he was welcomed at a public dinner at which his praises were sung in every key. He had won from England respect for American literature, and no honors were too

## *HISTORIANS AND ESSAYISTS*

great for his fellow-countrymen to bestow upon him.

In the ten years between 1832 and 1842 Irving bought and developed the property on the east bank of the Hudson, north of Tarrytown and overlooking the Tappan Zee, to which he gave the name of Sunnyside. He traveled some in the far West, and published 'A Tour on the Prairies' (1835), 'Astoria' (1836), and the 'Adventures of Captain Bonneville' (1837). For the four years from 1842 to 1846 he was United States Minister to Spain; a post for which he was especially well fitted, and to which he was appointed as a sort of national recognition of his services to the cause of letters. While he was in Madrid he was planning and arranging the material for the early volumes of his 'Life of Washington'; the first volume of which did not appear, however, until 1855. His 'Life of Goldsmith' was published in 1849, 'Mahomet and his Successors' in the winter of the same year, 'Wolfert's Roost' in 1854, and the fifth and final volume of his 'Washington' only a short time before his death at Sunnyside on November 28th, 1859.

Irving's literary activity thus extended

## WASHINGTON IRVING

over exactly half a century. The books which he published in that period fall naturally into four groups, each of which reflects his explorations, observations, and meditations in some special field. The first of these groups is made up of the experimental Salmagundi papers, the Knickerbocker 'History,' the 'Sketch Book,' 'Bracebridge Hall,' and 'Tales of a Traveller'; all of which were published while the author was between twenty-six and forty-one years of age. They were the fruit of his interest, first in the Dutch history and legends that gave a quaint charm to Old New York, and to the customs and manners of the early settlers in the valley of the Hudson; and second in the romantic and picturesque aspects of foreign life which had stirred his fancy and imagination during his two sojourns abroad. Although they were not published in book form until many years later, the sketches and tales gathered under the title of 'Wolfert's Roost' belong to the same time and to the same group. The second group consists of the volumes which were the outgrowth of Irving's residence in Spain, and of his admiration for the daring and adventurous life of the early Spanish voyagers, and for the splen-



## *HISTORIANS AND ESSAYISTS*

did story, so brilliant with Oriental pageantry and with barbaric color, of the Moorish invasion and occupancy of Spain. The third group includes the three books in which Irving pictured with a vivid realism, with an accurate knowledge, and with a narrative style that gave to two at least of these volumes the fascination of romance, the perils and hardships which the explorers, fur-traders, hunters, and trappers of the Northwest endured in the early years of the present century. Finally, the last group embraces the historical and biographical works of the author's last years.

Of all these books, the one that is the boldest in conception and that shows the most virility is the first one that Irving published, —the Knickerbocker 'History of New York.' Born of an audacity that is the privilege of youth, this 'History' was the product of a mind untrammelled by literary traditions, and bent only upon giving the freest play to its fanciful idea of the grotesquely humorous possibilities of the Dutch character and temperament when confronted with problems of State. In freshness, vigor, and buoyancy the narrative is without a parallel in our literature. It is literally saturated with the spirit

## WASHINGTON IRVING

of broad comedy, the effect of which is immeasurably heightened by the air of historical gravity with which the narrative is presented. The character studies are full of individuality, and are drawn with a mock seriousness and with a minuteness that give them all the qualities of actual historical portraits; while the incidents are pictured with a vividness that invests them with an atmosphere of reality, from the influence of which the sympathetic reader escapes with difficulty. I know of no piece of broad, sustained humor in English or in American literature which is the equal of the narrative of the capture of Fort Casimir,—an episode in the description of which the Homeric manner is adopted with grandiloquent effect. A phrase may be found here and there in the book which is out of harmony with the taste of our day; but ninety years make considerable difference in such matters, and all must admit that these seventeenth-century touches are not unnatural in a youth whose early reading had carried him in many directions in search of the novel and eccentric in life and letters. Taken as a whole the book is a masterpiece, revealing a limitless fund of humor, a shrewd knowledge of human na-

## *HISTORIANS AND ESSAYISTS*

ture, and a deep love of mankind, and governed throughout by a fine sense of the literary possibilities and limitations of historical burlesque.

In any book which might be made up of Irving's legends of the Hudson, and of his stories on other American themes, the precedence would be given without protest from any quarter, I think, to the tender, pathetic, sweetly humorous story of 'Rip Van Winkle.' The change of style that one perceives in these stories and in the tales of Spanish, French, and English life, as compared with that in the Knickerbocker 'History,' is marked. If there is a loss of youthful vigor and enthusiasm, there is a decided gain in grace of form, in simplicity, in delicacy and tenderness of feeling, and in refinement of humor. These are the qualities which give a permanent value to writing and make it literature. They suffuse 'Rip Van Winkle' and the 'Legend of Sleepy Hollow' with an undying charm, and lift these legends to a higher plane than that occupied by the Knickerbocker 'History.' In them Irving gave the fullest and freest play to his artistic nature. The tales from over seas in this first group of his books reflect the "charms of

## WASHINGTON IRVING

storied and poetical association" which his active fancy pictured when he escaped from the "commonplace realities of the present," and lost himself among the "shadowy grandeurs of the past." He brought, too, an appreciative mind to the contemplation of the quiet beauty of English country life. It was always, however, the human element in the scene that was of interest to him; and this, I think, is one of the principal reasons why so much of his work has retained its vitality through three-quarters of a century.

It is not surprising—to take up the second group of Irving's books—that a man of his poetic temperament found Spain "a country where the most miserable inn is as full of adventure as an enchanted castle." It was the historical associations, however, which especially appealed to him, and to the inspiration of which we are indebted for some of his most brilliant pages. The glories of old Spain in the days of the Moslem invader and in the reign of Ferdinand and Isabella, when the adventurous spirit of the Spanish sailors was at its height, and when great enterprises inflamed men's minds with the lust for conquest and power and riches,—these were the themes

## *HISTORIANS AND ESSAYISTS*

that kindled his sympathetic imagination. To these influences was due the 'Life of Columbus,'—which may seem somewhat antiquated in form to a generation accustomed to the modern style of biography, but which is nevertheless a very solid piece of historical writing, calm, clear, judicious, and trustworthy,—together with the collection of legends and historical narratives growing out of the Moorish conquest. In the 'Conquest of Granada' and in the 'Alhambra' tales Irving's style, affected no doubt by the variety and richness of the color of the scenes which he is depicting, is a little lacking at times in the fine reticence which distinguishes his best work; but the fact remains that his picture of this chapter of Spanish history was of such a character as to discourage any successor from attempting to deal with the same topic.

Two of the three books descriptive of the wild life of the Northwest, 'Astoria' and the 'Adventures of Captain Bonneville,' were based upon documents placed at Irving's disposal by John Jacob Astor, supplemented by oral narratives and by the author's recollections of his own experiences during the journey which he made on the prairies after his

## WASHINGTON IRVING

second return from Europe. In addition to the deep interest attaching to the tragic story of the suffering and dangers encountered by the overland party which Mr. Astor dispatched to establish a fur-trading post at the mouth of the Columbia River, the 'Astoria' is filled with graphic character sketches of the hardy adventurers who gathered in those days at the frontier settlements, — men of varied nationalities and of eccentric and picturesque individualities, all of whom are as actual in Irving's pages as if they had been studied from the life. It may be nothing more than a fancy, but I like to think that this incursion into the trackless regions of the Northwest, in company with the primitive types of the explorer, the hunter, and the trapper, reflects a natural reaction of Irving's mind after so long a sojourn in the highly cultivated society of Europe, and a yearning on his part to find rest and refreshment by getting as close as possible in his work to Mother Nature.

Of the three biographies which were the last product of his pen, the 'Life of Goldsmith' is noteworthy as having more of the charm of his earlier manner than the others have. He was in peculiar sympathy with

## *HISTORIANS AND ESSAYISTS*

the subject of this volume, and told the story of his life with an insight which no later biographer has brought to the task. The 'Mahomet and his Successors' is an honest, straightforward, conscientious piece of work, but did not add anything to the author's reputation. He expended an enormous amount of time and labor on the 'Life of Washington,' but the work was too large and too exacting for a man of his age to undertake. There are passages in it that for incisiveness of characterization and for finish of form are the equal of anything that he produced in the days when his intellectual vigor was unimpaired; but the reader cannot escape the feeling that the author's grasp of the materials relating to the subject was feeble, and that his heart was not in his work. It dragged terribly, he tells us, in the writing; and it drags too in the reading. Nor does it seem likely that even if the task had been undertaken twenty years earlier the theme would have been altogether a congenial one. Washington, in the perspective from which Irving viewed him,—and one must remember that the lad was six years old when Washington took the oath of office as President, and may have witnessed that ceremony almost

## WASHINGTON IRVING

from his father's doorstep,—was a very real man who had solved a very real problem. There was no atmosphere surrounding him that corresponded to the romantic glamour which transfigured the personality of Columbus, or to the literary associations which were linked with Goldsmith's name; and Irving required some such stimulus to the imagination in order to enable him to do his best work.

Irving, finally, was the first American man of letters whose writings contained the vital spark. No one would venture to say that he possessed a creative imagination of the highest order, such as Hawthorne for example was gifted with. The tragedy of life, the more strenuous problems that arise to torment mankind, had no attraction for him. But he had nevertheless imagination of a rare sort, and the creative faculty was his also. Were this not so, his books would have been forgotten long ago. Neither his play of fancy, nor his delicious sense of humor, nor the singular felicity of his style could have saved his writings from oblivion if he had not possessed, in addition to these qualities, a profound knowledge of the romance and comedy of life, and the power,



## *HISTORIANS AND ESSAYISTS*

which is vouchsafed to few, to surround his characters and his scenes with some of the mellow glow of his own sweet and gentle spirit.

*Edwin W. Mose,*

**WILLIAM HICKLING PRESCOTT**

**(1796-1859)**

**BY**

**FRANCIS NEWTON THORPE**



## WILLIAM HICKLING PRESCOTT



PRESCOTT had been at work on his 'Ferdinand and Isabella' about four years when he adopted the plan that distinguishes all his histories. To this he was led by his confidence in Mably, author of '*Étude de l'Histoire*,' of whom he made this record:—"I like particularly his notion of the necessity of giving an interest as well as utility to history, by letting events tend to some obvious point or moral; in short, by paying such attention to the development of events tending to this leading result as one would in the construction of a romance or a drama." All the world knows the success of the plan: Prescott is read as freely as the great novelists and dramatists. A critical, rather than a creative, age has charged him with being

## HISTORIANS AND ESSAYISTS

more interesting than accurate. This is the old charge against Herodotus and against Thucydides; it is the charge made against Prescott's great English contemporary, Macaulay. What critic of either of these has won an equal place in literature? It would be gratifying, though difficult, to explain why an interesting history provokes suspicion. Each generation revises the record. Learned specialists who venture to become critics condemn an entire work because of a fault in relating an episode. The story of Philip the Second has been retold by one whose genius Prescott recognized and encouraged, just as his own had been recognized and encouraged by Washington Irving. The Spanish-American story has been retold by Sir Arthur Helps, by Markham, and by John Fiske.

A history is variously judged. One reader estimates it by its authorities; another by its style. Of literary virtues, style is the first to be cultivated and the last to be formed.

"With regard to the style of this work," wrote Prescott of his 'Ferdinand and Isabella' seven years after its completion, "I will only remark that most of the defects, such as they are, may be comprehended in the words *trop soigné*. At least they may be traced to this source. The only rule is, to write with freedom and nature, even with

## WILLIAM HICKLING PRESCOTT

homeliness of expression occasionally, and with alternation of long and short sentences; for such variety is essential to harmony. But, after all, it is not the construction of the sentence, but the tone of the coloring, which produces the effect. If the sentiment is warm, lively, forcible, the reader will be carried along without much heed to the arrangement of the periods, which differs exceedingly in different standard writers. Put life into the narrative, if you would have it take. Elaborate and artificial fastidiousness in the form of expression is highly detrimental to this. A book may be made up of perfect sentences and yet the general impression be very imperfect. In fine, be engrossed with the thought and not with the fashion of expressing it."

His plan and his style harmonize, and are principal causes of the popularity of his books. There is another cause: the fortunes of the men and women whose lives are depicted on his pages become of personal interest to the reader. Emerson would call this making history subjective,—“doing away with this wild, savage, and preposterous Then or There, and introducing in its place the Here and the Now”; banishing the *not-me* and supplying the *me*. All this Prescott has done. Children are lost in his ‘Mexico’ and ‘Peru’ even more quickly than in Shakespeare or Scott. The dramatist is suddenly philosophical; the novelist now and then technical: but the historian takes them straight on from embarkation through ship-

## *HISTORIANS AND ESSAYISTS*

wreck, battle, siege, conquest, and retreat, and all as real as the sights in the street. Here is a miracle like that Bunyan wrought, and even a greater; for it is the rare miracle of reality. Few are the historians who let us forget that their page is a paraphrase; their story, second-hand; their battles, sieges, and fortunes, only words.

Prescott's life, like his books, was a development of events tending to a leading result. Yet this result was due to an accident while at Harvard, a junior in his seventeenth year. A piece of bread thoughtlessly thrown at random by a fellow-student instantly destroyed the sight of one eye. The other speedily became affected, and he was never again able to use it, except at rare intervals and for a short time. Till the day of his death, forty-seven years after the accident, he suffered almost constantly. His life, without warning, became a strict construction of the law of compensation. He belonged to a distinguished family. His grandfather was that Captain Prescott who commanded at Bunker Hill. His father was an eminent lawyer, among whose closer friends were John Quincy Adams and Daniel Webster. His mother, from whom he inherited a large share of his

## *WILLIAM HICKLING PRESCOTT*

hopeful temperament and generous affection, was a woman possessed of the qualities of Abigail Adams. He had wealth; he had rare physical beauty. The mental man was complete. He lacked only that which he had lost by accident. He completed his college course, spent some time in search of relief in Europe, and returned to Salem, his home and his native place. At twenty-four he married; at twenty-six he decided on a literary life. Other men had eyes. Could he not accomplish, though slowly, as much as others less persevering? From the day of his decision his life followed a programme. It was method. His will made real what his wealth, his powers, made possible. But all followed resolutions, many of which a strong love of ease made almost useless. First he must prepare for work, then choose. He began a critical, exhaustive study of the English language and literature. Like studies of the French, the Italian, the Spanish, followed. He employed capable readers; and at twenty-eight, with many misgivings, respecting his own powers, planned a history of Ferdinand and Isabella. Ten years of labor followed, and the three volumes were published at Christmas 1837. They were



## *HISTORIANS AND ESSAYISTS*

printed at the Cambridge press at his own expense, a method he adhered to for all his books.

He was long in doubt whether to publish the history. His father's judgment decided his own. Bentley brought it out in England after it had been declined by two publishers. Its reception was an event in English literature, and time has not yet set aside the original verdict. He had found his work: Spain, new and old, at the height of its power. In 1839 he began reading for his 'Conquest of Mexico.' Four years later it was published. It had an unparalleled reception. Five thousand copies were sold in America in four months. This was only the beginning of a popularity which has been renewed by successive generations of readers. No history more perfectly illustrates the harmony of subject and style.

Early in 1844 he "broke ground," as he says, on Peru. In twelve months its 'Conquest' was written. It was nearly two years in press, and issued in 1847. Though most quickly done of his works, it sustained his reputation. Editions in French, German, Dutch, and Spanish almost immediately appeared. No American book had before been

## ***WILLIAM HICKLING PRESCOTT***

so received. The 'Conquest of Peru' closed his contribution to American history. He was in his fifty-first year and the most famed American scholar. The mantle of Irving had fallen upon him. His friendships were world-wide and among the great scholars of the age. Through these he was largely enabled to collect his vast mass of material. As Sismondi wrote him, he had attained rich sources interdicted to European scholars. No other man, certainly no other historian of his day, possessed and used such resources. His library contained the best from the archives of Europe, usually in copy; often the original. In the summer of 1849 he began reading for his history of Philip the Second. Frequent and afflicting interruptions, that would have vanquished a less resolute mind, beset him. Age was creeping on. Domestic sorrow bowed his spirit. In 1850, after many urgent requests, he visited England. His reception remained unique in the annals of society for thirty years. The England he knew was like that England that received James Russell Lowell in after years. The first volume of 'Philip' was completed in 1852; the second in 1854, when the two were published; and the third in 1858. A fourth

## *HISTORIANS AND ESSAYISTS*

was begun, but was carried no further than brief notes at the time of his sudden death at sixty-three.

Prescott never visited the scenes of his histories. For over forty years—his literary life—he divided his time between his three homes, all near his birthplace: the summer at Nahant; the autumn at Pepperell; the winter and spring in Boston,—for some years at the house on Bedford Street, but after 1845 at the Beacon Street home. Here was his great library, and here he died. His infirmity forbade travel. With his mind's eye he saw Mexico, Peru, and other regions in the vast Spanish empire,—all from the vantage-ground of his own library. Of his fidelity to his authorities no doubt has ever been hinted. He believed in foot-notes, and he spread his vouchers before the world. In later years some critics have doubted the value of his authorities, especially for the 'Mexico' and the 'Peru.' If they erred he erred. If they, for their own purposes, read European civilization into the institutions of the Aztecs, Prescott had no means of correcting their vision. He faithfully followed the canons of history, and trusted the evidence brought forward by the actors themselves.

## *WILLIAM HICKLING PRESCOTT*

What he saw in their records—duly corrected one by the other—was that panorama of the New World which was spread before the eyes of Europe by its conquerors, and which the Old World believed, and still believes, true. No historian is responsible for not using undiscovered evidence. Prescott wrote from the archives of Europe, just as others have written before and after him, confident of the accuracy of their evidence. If he moved his Aztec world on too high a plane of civilization, he moved it by authority. Since his death the world has turned traveler; men of critical skill have explored Mexico and Peru, and each has produced his pamphlet. A mass of ethnological and archeological knowledge has been collected, much of which corrects the angle of Spanish vision of the sixteenth century. But all this is from the American side. Prescott wrote his 'Mexico' and 'Peru' from the European side—of the time of Isabella, Charles, and Philip. If one cares to know how the Old World first understood the New, he will read Prescott. If he wishes to know how the New World of to-day interprets that New World of four centuries ago, he will read Markham and Fiske. Prescott's beautiful character is reflected in his

## ***HISTORIANS AND ESSAYISTS***

style and in his fidelity to his authorities. Archeology and ethnology may correct some of his descriptions; but as literature his four histories will undoubtedly be read with pleasure as long as the English remains a living language.

*Francis Norton Hooper*





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